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# A REVIEW OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

EDITED BY A. NORMAN JEFFARES



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A REVIEW OF  
ENGLISH  
LITERATURE

VOLUME ONE      NUMBER ONE      JANUARY 1960

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*Professor of English Literature at the University of Leeds*

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## *Editorial*

LITERATURE is a thing to be enjoyed; and if the literary critic is to succeed he must communicate his enjoyment of it. His role is to illuminate, to help us to understand what we read, to elucidate, modify and develop taste. To do all or any of this he needs to be a person who can respond to a work of literature without getting between it and the reader; yet he must also be a person of lively and penetrating mind who adds to our enjoyment of what we read by writing about it in a stimulating and appreciative way. Deep knowledge should be matched by wide sympathies if the critic is to enrich his readers' perception. He will make enlightening comparisons and refer literature to life itself.

This journal intends to offer criticism of English literature to an audience which it is hoped will consist not only of those who are professionally engaged in the study and teaching of literature but also of general readers. To write for the general reader and the specialist the critic must avoid current tricks of critical technique. Obscurity and unnecessary difficulty may indeed lend a pseudo-scientific air to over-specialised criticism, but the best corrective to such pretentious writing is the example of critics who write clearly and with zest, and like Dryden, Johnson, Coleridge and Arnold, write to be widely read.

Critics who write in this journal will not only have a wide audience in mind but will also perhaps give a wide scope to their interpretation of the title English Literature. In addition to the achievement of English writers, this has long included the work of Scots, Welsh and Irish, and now a review of English Literature may profitably include discussion of literature written in the Commonwealth, the United States and elsewhere. Literature has a refreshing habit of passing over politicians' boundaries into a larger world of ideas, and England's language and her literature at this juncture of their history have a great unifying force.

England is the root of the tree of literature written in English. Her language runs through all its ramifications. Her literature is something which those who write in English overseas cannot easily avoid, whether they make the choice of using, abusing, ignoring or adapting this living legacy. Nor can the spreading and burgeoning of the parent stock be ignored by discerning critics in England. Indeed literature written in England can itself be the more deeply appreciated if contemporary literatures written in English elsewhere are taken seriously in their own right, as part and parcel of cultures and civilisations which, while they often sprang from and continue English ways of living, are developing in different ways. England herself is also changing and her literature is reflecting and interpreting these changes. All this development and expansion demands comparison, because literary criticism inherently depends upon that activity. Literary criticism itself is demanded because it protects and preserves what is best in literature, which acts as an expression of civilisation, and the life which produces it. The mirror of life in Shakespeare was appreciated by Johnson because he knew that literature is important only as it deals with 'the real state of sublunary nature which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow'.

This journal, then, will not restrict itself to discussion of English Literature in any narrow sense. Articles upon writers and their work outside as well as inside Britain will be included, and these articles will be written by critics from all parts of the world, from outside as well as inside the ranks of established literary criticism. There will be articles upon the work of past and present major and minor writers, reassessments of critics, studies of conditions of publication at various times, articles on literary journals and upon various other subjects. From time to time a large proportion of space will be devoted to discussion of a single author or theme; short poems and prose passages will also be included as space permits; and each issue will usually contain one long signed review.

A.N.J.

# Robert South

JAMES SUTHERLAND

WHEN Parson Adams, that great 'enemy to the passions', offered a London bookseller a parcel of his sermons for publication, he came up against a strong sales resistance. Sermons, he has told firmly, were mere drugs on the market. They are so obviously drugs on the twentieth-century market that the modern reader may be apt to assume that the bookseller was only telling Adams the unwelcome truth; yet even in the 1740's volumes of sermons were still selling well, and they formed, indeed, a considerable part of the ordinary publisher's stock in trade. A generation earlier they were more popular still, and perhaps they had their heyday in the years following the Restoration, that period which the modern reader is likely to associate exclusively with widdy plays and licentious poems, with Etherege and Wycherley, Rochester and Mrs. Behn. The sermons of such famous preachers as Barrow, South, Stillingfleet, Sherlock, and Tillotson were very far indeed from being drugs on the market, and the continuing demand for them in the eighteenth century is reflected in a steady accession of collected editions in many volumes. Even Edmund Arloll, whose usual best-sellers were little books with titles like *The Cases of Impotency* and *Venus in the Cloister: Or, The Nun in the Smock*, found it worth his while in 1717 to go shares in the publication of South's *Opera Posthuma*, and to publish a Latin oration pronounced over his dead body, and a Life 'with a true copy of his . . . last will and testament'.

All this, perhaps, is not likely to persuade the modern reader that he is going to lose much if he never reads a sermon by Robert South. In fact, he will lose a good deal. The number of first-class minds is not so great that we can lightly afford to ignore

a man who thinks so clearly and precisely and powerfully as South invariably does. But quite apart from this, and his value as a moralist and theologian, he was a writer of rare distinction. If only he had left behind him, like Cowley, a handful of essays, he would have a secure and permanent place today in the literary history of his country. As it is, he is now virtually unknown and unread; the odour of sermons offends modern literary nostrils and South is protected from the critics, as the Victorian Macaulay said of Wycherley, 'as a skunk is protected against the hunters'.

Robert South (1634-1716) must have been one of the most brilliant scholars that Oxford ever produced. He was a Westminster boy, a pupil of the famous Dr. Busby, and a contemporary of Dryden and Locke. In 1651 he was elected a Student of Christ Church. Eight years later he was preaching an assize sermon at St. Mary's, and the following year (he was not yet twenty-six years old) he was chosen Public Orator, and held that office for many years. South never became a bishop. Bishops need not be dull, but when men are as witty as South (or Swift) they are suspect; and neither South nor Swift ever learnt to suffer fools gladly. In a sermon which he once preached on 'The Fatal Imposture and Force of Words', South enlarged upon the way in which 'a fool in power' enjoys listening to those who are prepared to flatter him:

And therefore, you shall seldom see that such an one cares to have men of worth, honesty, and veracity about him; for such persons cannot fall down and worship stocks and stones, though they are placed never so high above them. But their *yea* is *yea*, and their *nay*, *nay*; and they cannot admire a *fox* for his sincerity, a *wolf* for his generosity, nor an *ass* for his wit and ingenuity; and therefore can never be acceptable to those whose whole credit, interest, and advantage lies in their not appearing to the world what they really are in themselves. None are or can be welcome to such but those who speak *paint* and *wash*; for that is the thing they *love*; and no wonder, since it is the thing they *need*.

The soul of South must have had a lean and hungry look; he thought too much, he was too little a respecter of persons in high places, and he was too unapt to compromise to be easily made bishop. Charles II is said to have thought of it, and to have asked

to be put in mind of South 'at the next death', but nothing came of it; and when at length, at the age of almost eighty, he was offered the bishopric of Rochester, he had the grace to decline it.

It was the considered opinion of Fielding that the sermons of South contained perhaps more wit than the comedies of Congreve. On a purely quantitative basis of so much wit per page, this is clearly not so; but in almost every one of South's numerous sermons there is persistent and memorable evidence of a brilliant mind at work. On a qualitative basis, the advantage is often with South rather than Congreve. So much Restoration wit is merely verbal mockery, repartee, word play, the nicely turned phrase, that it hardly lives beyond the moment. South has his satirical felicities of phrase in plenty, but his wit is never confined to the expression of clever nothings; it is characteristically employed to give brilliant and imaginative expression of the point he had all along intended to make. No one knew better than South himself that the kind of intellectual liveliness which he could never bring himself to suppress in the pulpit was likely to frighten the dull, the timid, and the conventional. In a sermon called 'The Scribe instructed', where he claims that the faculties of the mind most necessary to the preacher are judgement, memory, and invention, he dwells on invention with obvious pleasure. It is a faculty, he suggests:

acting chiefly in the strength of what is offered it by the imagination. This is so far from being admitted by many as necessary that it is decry'd by them as utterly unlawful; such grand exemplars, I mean, as make their own abilities the sole measure of what is fit or unfit, lawful or unlawful; so that what they themselves cannot reach, others, forsooth, ought not to attempt. But I see not why divinity should suffer from their narrowness, and be deprived of the service or most useful and excellent endowment of the mind, and which gives a gloss and a shine to all the rest . . . *Piety engages no man to be dull.*

Having got that said with his usual vigour, South goes on to make it clear that he holds no brief for fancy (=imagination) if nothing more is meant by that term than 'a conceited, curious, whimsical brain, which is apt to please itself in strange, odd, and

ungrounded notions'. That is fancy in 'the worst sense'. What he has in mind is something quite different:

But if, on the other hand, we take fancy for that power or ability of the mind which suggests apposite and pertinent expressions, and handsome ways of cloathing and setting off those truths which the judgement has rationally pitched upon, it will be found full as useful as any of the three mentioned by us, in the work of preaching; and consequently slighted and disapproved of by none but such as envy that in others which they are never like to be envied for the want of in themselves.

What South advocates here is something that he himself constantly achieved in his sermons. The truths which his judgement had rationally pitched upon could be expressed in plain, forthright language (as indeed they usually are in the sermons of Swift), or they could be uttered in the moving and pathetic language of the 'painful' preacher. South's aristocratic temperament and intellectual integrity prevented him from adopting the second of those two alternatives, which he would have associated with the dissenting preacher, the 'holder-forth' whom he was never tired of satirising. What, then, was his objection to the first alternative? As an experienced divine he knew that the method of plain, unadorned argument—though eminently respectable and unexceptional on the grounds of taste—was apt to fail in its purpose on account of that resistance which unwelcome truths always set up in the minds of a congregation. But even if one were to discount the resistance, and allow for a willingness in the godly (after all they *had* come to church) to have their shortcomings brought home to them, the preacher is bound to be dealing most of the time with matters which have been rehearsed over and over again, and which by their very familiarity are less likely to capture the attention. It was just here, as South saw it, that the imaginative preacher could defeat the lethargy of inattention by his ability to find 'handsome ways of cloathing and setting off those truths'. When, for example, South is dealing with the way in which non-conformity has helped to destroy the decent forms and ceremonies of the traditional church service, he is on a topic which had

aged anglican divines ever since the Restoration. The thing is important, and could never be said too often; but it must have been terribly familiar, and it would have to be said in a new and compelling way if men were to listen, and not to sleep. Said by South, it comes over like a new thought:

thus to sequester the divine worship from all external assistances, that by such means (forsooth) it may become wholly mental, and *all spirit*, is, no doubt a notable fetch of the devil, who, we know, is *all spirit* himself, but never the less a devil for being so. On the contrary, we have rather cause to fear that in the length of this pretence the worship of Christ may be treated as Christ himself once he was; that is, first be *stripped*, and then *crucify'd*.

South's 'judgement' and 'memory', then, gave the preacher the material of his discourse; it was the business of 'invention' to make that material attractive, and 'invention' was therefore concerned with thought as well as expression. In his *Life of Swift* Johnson praised the lucidity of Swift's prose, but he considered that Swift's 'easy and safe conveyance of meaning' had only a limited effectiveness:

For purposes merely didactick, when something is to be told that was not known before, it is the best mode, but against that inattention by which known truths suffered to lie neglected it makes no provision; it instructs, but does not persuade.

South does not always persuade, he invariably secures attention to 'known truths'; for, as he once remarked of sermons, 'that which is carried on with a continued unflagging vigour of expression can never be thought tedious, nor consequently long'. When the congregation dispersed at the end of the service, the thoughts which South had drawn their attention must still have been working in their minds: sometimes, no doubt, returning to the memory in the very words the preacher had used, but more often, perhaps, remembered by the striking turn of the thought.

The memorable phrase is frequent enough in South. In a sermon preached on 30 January 1663, he spent some time in attacking the Presbyterians, whose unpopularity after the Restoration was

mainly due to the fact that, although they had not countenanced the judicial murder of Charles I, they had been the chief instigators of the rebellion, and had then lost control of it to the extremists. South was too bitter to give them any credit for their good intentions. The Presbyterians were now seeking to dissociate themselves from the King's death, which had been 'taken out of their hands by others more cunning, though no less wicked than themselves', and having 'laid the premisses' they were now protesting against the conclusion. Theirs was no better than 'post-dated loyalty', and South would have none of it. 'They do but cover their prevarication,' he said, 'with a fig-leaf.'

To the qualities of judgement, memory, and invention which South considered essential for the preacher, he might have added a fourth—that knowledge of human nature which he himself had in abundance. His understanding of the way the mind works, and his unflinching habit of facing facts and confronting his listeners with their own weaknesses, are responsible for some of his most memorable observations:

Nobody is so weak but he is strong enough to bear the misfortunes that he does not feel.

Old folks love mightily to give good advice, because this makes them some sort of amends for being incapable now of setting ill examples.

But it is to South's wit that we always return. From some of the examples already given, it will be seen that it is often sharp and sarcastic. South is frequently satirical, and his peculiar quality is a sort of patrician scorn. In his attitude to the lower classes, whom he seems almost to identify with republicanism and religious sectarianism, he shows the impatience and contempt of a Coriolanus, but he prefers the polite sneer to open invective. In the preface to a sermon preached in 1667, on the occasion of the consecration of a chapel, he seized the chance to make one of his many derisory references to the defeated supporters of the 'Good old Cause', who, to South, were no better than a horde of ignorant and unlettered rebels:

After the happy expiration of those times which had reformed so many churches to the ground, and in which men used to express their honour to God and their allegiance to their prince the same way, demolishing the palaces of the one, and the temples of the other; it is now our glory and felicity that God has changed men's tempers with the times, and made a spirit of building succeed a spirit of pulling down: by a miraculous revolution reducing many from the mad of a triumphant rebellion to their old condition of masons, smiths, and carpenters, that in this capacity they might repair what as colonels and captains they had ruined and defaced.

This is not, of course, the language of Christian charity, but it must be remembered that in the years following the Restoration the Anglican divine felt that he had to preach politics as well as religion, since his church had come very near to being totally destroyed by a political revolution. Indeed, in a sermon written for the old boys of Westminster School, but never preached owing to the death of Charles II, South was still advocating, a quarter of a century after the Restoration, an unforgiving and unforgetting policy for all true Anglican parents:

Let them tell their children over and over, of the villainous imprisonments, and intemperate tryal, and the barbarous murder of that blessed and royal Martyr, a company of coblers, taylors, draymen, drunkards, whoremongers, and broken tradesmen; though since, I confess, dignify'd with the title of the *sober* *parent of the nation*. . . .

The pulpit, it is clear, put little restraint on the freedom of South's utterance; but to appreciate his scorn at its most devastating we may turn to his controversy with Dr. Sherlock, where he had an opponent nearer to his own weight.<sup>1</sup> Sherlock had published views on the Trinity which seemed to South heretical, a gross simplification of an abstruse problem, and—what, for South, was almost as bad—the work of an intellectual muddler. In *Tritheism Charged upon Dr. Sherlock's New Notion of the Trinity* (1695), he subjected Sherlock's arguments to a merciless scrutiny,

For the personal background to the quarrel between South and Sherlock, see M. T. Dodds (Mrs. Winifred Nowotny), 'Robert South and William Sherlock: some Unpublished Letters', *Modern Language Review*, Vol. xxxix, no. 3, July 1944.

and ridiculed them with his scornful and unsparing wit. When, for instance, Sherlock was driven to admit that on one point he might have expressed his meaning rather badly, South pounced on him at once:

Well, but if by this man's own confession his words are so unjustifiable, how then does he think to bring himself off? Why, by the help of his old friend *his meaning*, that constant plea and refuge of a baffled person. But still, I say, what have we to do with this man's *meaning* and *intentions* against his plain, clear, and unquestionable words used at least forty times over? For, are men's words to be understood by their *meaning*, or their *meaning* by their *words*? It is a pleasant thing certainly, that when Mr. Dean has brought himself into a plunge by his indefensible expressions, Mr. *Meaning* must be call'd in to lift him out, and wipe him clean again with his *intentions*; and that he can find nothing else to defend himself with but that comical salvo of the renowned Hugh Peters, *Give me that word again!*

Here the cat is playing, beautifully and fatally, with the mouse, throwing it in the air, snatching it again, going through the gracefully cruel movements of an animal that is enjoying the exercise of its natural skill. Once again South's fancy has enabled him to give a satirical edge to the truth which his judgement 'has rationally pitched upon', and on this occasion he has expressed himself not only with wit, but with a droll humour.

South was a truly formidable opponent, ruthless, remorseless, and completely in control of himself and his argument. One may have reservations about him as a man: he had more than the average Englishman's capacity to hate, and to keep on hating, he was very much of a superior person, with standards so exclusive that he could have found very few who came up to them. But as a writer, how lively he is, how well-bred, how politely and confidently at his ease! In his colloquial bantering of Sherlock he shows that 'native easiness' and that 'close, naked, natural way of speaking' which were the stylistic aims of the early Fellows of the Royal Society, but which only Robert Hook and one or two others really achieved. But who reads South today? Who cares if he is among the ten or a dozen best writers of English prose? 'O good old man! . . . Thou art not for the fashion of these times.

# *The Rustic Inmates of the Hamlet*

JAMES KINSLEY

## I

WRITING to Dr. Moore from Edinburgh in 1787, at the height of his success among the literati, Burns declares:

For my part, my first ambition was, and still my strongest wish is, to please my compeers, the rustic Inmates of the Hamlet, while everchanging language and manners will allow me to be relished and understood . . . I know very well, the novelty of my character has by far the greatest share in the learned and polite notice I have lately got; . . . I am not vain enough to hope for distinguished poetic fame.<sup>1</sup>

He saw himself, in the preface to the Kilmarnock edition of the *Poems* (1786), as a poet of the Ayrshire countryside writing for his own people about the life he shared with them, singing 'the sentiments and manners, he felt and saw in himself and his rustic companions around him, in his and their native language'. In 'The Vision', an unsuccessful but significant poem in this edition, Burns's Muse Coila (Kyle) reminds him how:

I taught thy manners-painting strains,  
The *loves*, the *ways* of simple swains,  
Till now, o'er all my wide domains,  
Thy fame extends.

He cannot teach him Thomson's 'landscape-glow', or Shenstone's art in waking passion, or Gray's 'moving flow'; but the zephyr blows sweetly beneath the rose:

*Letters*, ed. J. de L. Ferguson, 1931, i. 70.

Then never murmur or repine;  
Strive in thy *humble sphere* to shine;

. . . . .  
*A rustic Bard.*

The manners of the country folk of Ayrshire are reflected with sympathy, humour, and satire, in 'The Twa Dogs', 'The Holy Fair', 'Halloween', and 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', which take up more than a quarter of the Kilmarnock volume; and there was more to come, unpublished or as yet unwritten. The tradition in which these poems were made is worth investigating.

Dr. Johnson, writing of pastoral poetry, speaks for Augustan England when he says that:

The state of a man confined to the employments and pleasures of the country, is so little diversified, and exposed to so few of those accidents which produce perplexities, terrors, and surprises, in more complicated transactions, that he can be shewn but seldom in such circumstances as attract curiosity.<sup>1</sup>

Thomson, Gray, Goldsmith, and Cowper had, it is true, begun to modify Augustan indifference or humorous condescension to the country poor; but their sympathy springs from an awareness that many a flower is born to blush unseen, a sense of the levelling power of death, or an abhorrence of poverty. It was not until Wordsworth that English poets began, when they wrote of peasants, to see:

into the depth of human souls,  
Souls that appear to have no depth at all  
To careless eyes.<sup>2</sup>

The Scottish Augustans show no more sympathetic insight. James Beattie, in 'The Minstrel' (1768) which Burns admired so much, takes over the Spenserian stanza of Shenstone's serio-comic

<sup>1</sup> *The Rambler*, No. 36, 21 July 1750. Cf. the Scottish Hume's opinion that 'the pleasantries of a waterman, the observations of a peasant . . . are natural, and disagreeable. . . . Nothing can please persons of taste, but nature drawn with all her graces and ornaments, *la belle nature* . . .' (*Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, 1912 i. 240).

<sup>2</sup> *The Prelude*, xiii. 166 ff.

schoolmistress' to sing of the 'progress of genius' in a poor singer:

Beyond the lowly vale of shepherd life  
 They never roamed; secure beneath the storm  
 Which in Ambition's lofty land is rife,  
 Where peace and love are cankered by the worm  
 Of pride, each bud of joy industrious to deform.

But the rustic speaks with respect of popular superstition and folk-tale, of rustic merriment, but pastoral artifice and philosophical reflection obstruct his sympathy.

The vernacular poets come nearer to the heart of country life. As has been said for the realism and sympathy of Ramsay's poetic portraits in 'Richy and Sandy' and 'The Gentle Shepherd', the infection of the Augustan burlesque-pastoral lingers about the poetry. Alexander Ross, an Aberdeenshire schoolmaster, goes further in the right direction in 'The Fortunate Shepherdess, a Pastoral Tale' (1768)—observing, as he says in his advertisement, 'the natural effects of the human passions on the conduct and manners of plain country people'. The poem, in couplet narrative, has merit in natural description and realistic detail of 'auld Scots'. The Spenserian stanza is revived, but for a while the vernacular genre-painting, by Fergusson in 'The Farmer's Ingle' (1773). There are touches of sentiment and reflection here, as in Gray, Thomson, Shenstone and others; but these are assimilated to the broad and homely Scots, and take nothing from Fergusson's realistic, kindly-humorous pictures of rural life.

In 1784 Burns met with Fergusson's *Poems*, and strung his poetic lyre with emulating vigour'.<sup>1</sup> His debts to Fergusson are everywhere in the group of poems written before 1786 and published in part in the Kilmarlock edition. One of these, 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', continues the convention of manners-painting in the Spenserian stanza, and owes a conspicuous debt to 'The Farmer's Ingle'. Much admired in its day, 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' has since come in for harsh criticism. It is, says

*Letters*, i. 113. For the date 1784, see M. P. McDiarmid in *The Poems of Robert Fergusson*, STS, i. 178-81.

David Daiches, 'the most imitative and artificial of [Burns'] *major* works,' in which he is 'writing with one eye on his subject and another squinting at the kind of audience he sought to please by imitating' Pope, Goldsmith, Thomson, and others.<sup>1</sup> But Burns's error lies less in this than in trying to fuse two traditions and styles. Form and theme were always closely associated in his mind. Shenstone and Beattie, his models in the Spenserian stanza, wrote rhetorically and in English; the precedents for poetic *comment* on rural life were English. Fergusson, writing Spenserians in Scots, may have seemed to Burns to be denying himself the advantages of the rhetorical style; but the quality of his descriptive passages in the vernacular was a challenge to Burns. He tried to preserve the virtues of both styles, and the poem fails much through a confusion of language and tone as through Burns's inadequacy in the English manner.

## II

He found his true form and style for manners-painting in another much older tradition. From the Middle Ages there survive many poems, of varying scope and complexity, celebrating peasant merry-making. The conventional matter of the 'peasant-brawl', especially in Germany, is a feast and a dance to mark some public occasion—a May-day, a kirmes, or a country wedding—at which the merry-making degenerates into brawling farce. The pageant origin of such festivities is often reflected in the costume and antics of the peasantry, and in licentious behaviour during or after the dances. The attitude of the poet to his subject is hilarious and satiric; this is not poetry by peasants for peasants, and it seems unlikely that the manners-painting has any realistic intention. The outstanding example of the brawl in continental literature is Heinrich Wittenwiler's *Ring*;<sup>3</sup> but there are earlier, lyric forms

<sup>1</sup> Robert Burns, 1952, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. H. Hügli, *Der deutsche Bauer im Mittelalter*, 1929, pp. 136–7.

<sup>3</sup> Fifteenth century, on epic scale; ed. E. Wiessner, 1931; translated with commentary by G. F. Jones, 1956.

brawl underlying the *Ring*, notably in the work of the thirteenth-century minnesinger Neidhart of Reuenthal;<sup>1</sup> and some French lyrics have peasant-brawl motifs.<sup>2</sup>

I know of no Middle English brawls except the 'Tournament of Tottenham' printed in Percy's *Reliques*.<sup>3</sup> Surviving Scottish examples are the anonymous 'Chrystis Kirk on the Grene' and 'Peblis to the Play', and Alexander Scott's 'Justing and Debait . . . with Wam Adamson and Johine Sym'.<sup>4</sup> Stanzas 'in which, as in French, a careful build-up is followed by a sudden whisking movement always had a strong attraction for Scottish minds';<sup>5</sup> and it is likely that the ten-line stanza (with its variable metrical scheme) found in these three poems, and handed down to Burns, was connected with the dances of May-day and other festivities. Alliterative patterns run through the stanza, reinforcing the progressive movement; and the dancing quality in 'Chrystis Kirk' is heightened by phrases like 'Then he to ga and scho to ga', 'He befoir and scho befoir', and by generous dashes of feminine rhyme on a swinging rhythm:

Off all thir madinis myld as meid  
Was nane sa gymp\* as Gillie;  
As ony rose hir rude† was reid,  
Hir lyre‡ was lyk the lillie;

See Wiessner's edition; Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-6.

e.g., the *pastourelle* 'Par un sentier l'autre jor chevauchie' (K. Bartsch, *Franz. Romanzen und Pastourellen*, 1870, p. 203).

See G. F. Jones, 'The Tournaments of Tottenham and Lappenhäusen', *PMLA* lxvi (1951), 1123-40.

The anonymous poems are commonly ascribed to James I of Scotland (1394-1437). *Chrystis Kirk* is preserved in the Bannatyne and Maitland Folio MSS (thirteenth century) and *Peblis to the Play* in the Maitland Folio MS. Both were accessible to Burns in at least one version—*Chrystis Kirk* in Allan Ramsay's *Poems* (1751), modified, and with two additional cantos by Ramsay; *Peblis to the Play* in Pinkerton's *Select Scottish Ballads* (1783). G. F. Jones has made a valuable comparison of these poems with the German peasant-brawl tradition (*PMLA* lxviii [1953], 1101-25), though he takes analysis and analogy too far—Scott's *Justing* (thirteenth century) survives in the Bannatyne MS.

K. Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature*, 1958, p. 115.

\* slender      † complexion      ‡ skin

Bot yallow, yallow was hir heid,  
 And sche of luif so sillie,  
 Thocht all hir kin suld haue bein deid  
 Sche wald haue bot sweit Willie  
 Allane  
 At Chrystis kirk of the grein.

'Peblis to the Play' opens on the expectant stir of the feast-day. The poet describes the excitement of dressing and making ready and the crowd on the road to Peebles (41-50). Lads and lasses meet and flirt, with a deal of sexual banter (51-80):

Ane winklot\* fell, and hir taill up;  
 'Wow,' quod Malkin, 'hyd yow:  
 Quhat neidis yow to maik it sua?  
 Yon man will nocht our-ryd yow!'<sup>1</sup>

The scene settles in a tavern, where a brawl develops in knock about farce (91-190), including the traditional rude comedy of squabbling husband and wife.<sup>2</sup> The brawl merges happily into dance to the bag-pipes (191-230) and, the dancing over, the poet leaves a scene of lovers' assignations (231-50) with a probable hint of sexual intimacy in the final, rather obscure stanza.<sup>3</sup>

'Chrystis Kirk on the Grene' is a much more literary poem, richer in description, and using romance diction which emphasises the author's burlesque intention. There is no opening description, or journey; the poem begins in a dance, with detailed sketches of the girls' costume, and the mixture of flirtation and amorous horse-play as in 'Peblis to the Play' (11-50). The dance runs on into trials of skill (51-100), and ultimately into a vigorous brawl, again with exchanges between husband and wife (101-230).

Allan Ramsay, impressed by this picture of a 'rustick Squabbling . . . in a most ludicrous Manner', and by the difficulty of the

\* *light wench*

<sup>1</sup> Comic exposure, usually in the flurry of the dance, is characteristic of the peasant-brawl. Cf. G. F. Jones's version of the *Ring*, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lindsay, *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, ed. J. Kinsley (1954), pp. 84-113-15, and the Coupar Banns to the play (Bannatyne MS).

<sup>3</sup> This seems, at any rate, to have been Pinkerton's reading of it.

za, added two cantos (1715 and 1718) in imitation. In the of these he turns from the brawl to 'the more agreeable ous of Drinking, Dancing, and Singing', with broad humour in heavy Scots. The canto ends in wedding-night farce, and a mary which gave Burns a hint for the close of 'The Holy':

Was ne'er in *Scotland* heard or seen  
 Sic Banqueting and Drinkin,  
 Sic Revelling and Battles keen,  
 Sic Dancing, and sic Jinkin,  
 And unko Wark that fell at E'en,  
 Whan Lasses were haff winkin,  
 They lost their Feet and baith their Een,  
 And Maidenheads gae'd linkin  
 Aff a' that Day.

say's second canto is made up of more robustious genre-ting, with 'a new Scene of Drinking' and some good character-sketches. 'Deep drinking and bloodless Quarrels makes and of an old Tale', with an indecent final stanza illustrating proverb 'Mens Liths and Limbs are souple when intoxicated'. satiric intention of the medieval poets is drawn into harmony in the Augustan attitude to peasant life: this, says Ramsay in a note, is a comedy representing 'the Follies and Mistakes of y Life in a just Light, making them appear as ridiculous as they y are'.

ergusson's 'Hallow-Fair' (1772) is likewise written humor-ly from the outside, a keen and high-spirited description of a ic holiday. He communicates all the bustle and noise of the the gallimaufry of chapmen and wives in search of bargains, and lasses, gabbling children and roaring recruiting-sergeants fighting drunks, in vigorous Scots. But his engagement in the of the fair is limited by his sense of its comic vulgarity (and he es free use of the burlesque feminine rhyme):<sup>1</sup>

The double Rhyme,' says Dryden in his criticism of Butler, is 'a necessary panion of Burlesque Writing' (*Poems*, ed. J. Kinsley, 1958, ii. 663). Cf. is, Preface to *Miscellanies* (1693), 'these Rhymes . . . as peculiarly becoming est, as a roguish Leer, or a comical tone of a Voice'; *The Spectator*, Nos. 60 49.

Here country John in bonnet blue,  
 An' eke his Sunday's claise on,  
 Rins after Meg wi' *rokelay* new,  
 An' sappy kisses lays on;  
 She'll tauntin say, Ye silly coof\*!  
 Be o' your gab† mair spairin;  
 He'll tak the hint . . .

Fergusson's 'Leith Races' (1773) is a more elaborate poem. It opens with a dramatic prologue: on a July morning the poet meets a fair 'quean' with eyes 'o' the siller sheen' and 'Skin like snawy drift', who tells him her name is Mirth. She invites him to come and enjoy her 'pow'r an' pith' at Leith races:

We'll reel an' ramble thro' the sands,  
 And jeer wi' a' we meet;  
 Nor hip‡ the daft and gleesome bands  
 That fill Edina's street  
 Sae thrang that day.

Mirth then fades into the background, and we turn to the festivities she graces—the ladies again at their dressing, the town guards the crowd of 'ilka trade and station' getting down Leith Walk, ale-wives, chapmen and tricksters; hackney-coaches, some with 'honest folk' and some with 'mony a Whore in'; 'drink o' kin-kind' and the inevitable brawling. This is Fergusson's own vivid, noisy world. He writes from within the scene, sometimes—a significant innovation—commenting upon it (lines 109–110, 145–53).

### III

Burns's 'Halloween' is an antiquarian peasant-poem; the brief introductory sketch of feat lasses and trig lads gathered on Doon side on the witching night gives place to a long series of superstitious rites. Despite Burns's excellent description and comedy, his folk-lorist intention overloads the poem and keeps him too

\* fool      † mouth

‡ miss

outside. It is in 'The Holy Fair', where there is no overt comic purpose, that he makes his real contribution to the tradition of the peasant-poem.<sup>1</sup>

He had ample material for a poetic 'brawl' in the Ayrshire fairs of his day—the noisome company of chapmen and beggars, the dances in lodge and barn, and the chaos of drunkenness, bloody brawls, and sexual licence towards the close of the day.<sup>2</sup> But 'the annual celebration of the *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* in the rural parishes of Scotland [had] much in it of those old *Popish* festivals, in which superstition, traffic, and amusement, used to be strangely intermingled':<sup>3</sup> at his own door Burns had a richer theme, an outrageous marriage of the spirit and the flesh, of piety and impiety, in the holy fair. 'The farcical scene the poet . . . describes,' says Gilbert Burns, 'was often a favourite field of his observation, and the most of the incidents he mentions had actually passed before his eyes.'<sup>4</sup>

The essence of Burns's comic style is contrast. No doubt he learnt much about rhetorical antithesis from the Augustan poets; the deeper contrasts of tone, and between appearance and reality in human behaviour, lie at the heart of the Scottish comic tradition. (The outstanding example is Dunbar's *Tretis of the tua and the Wemen and the Wedo*.) 'The Holy Fair' is constructed on the fundamental irony of worship, drink, and sexual love set in juxtaposition; and this irony, quietly sustained throughout the poem, gives it a richness and significance lacking in Fergusson's manners-painting.

It should be noted that at this time the 'brawl' tradition was being adapted, to a low level of farce, by the chap-book prose-writers, notably by Douglass, the Bell-man of Glasgow. Here the old condescension to the manners of the 'vulgar' has gone; peasants are laughing at peasants.

See Aiton's *Agricultural Report*, 1811, pp. 568-74, quoted in *Ayrshire at the time of Burns*, Ayrshire Archaeological Society, 1959, pp. 71-5. The account is by Wittenwiler himself.

J. Heron, *Memoir of . . . Burns*, 1797, p. 13. Cf. the outraged *Letter from a Farmer* (1759) quoted in H. G. Graham, *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, 1950, p. 312.

*Letter to Currie*, in Burns's *Works*, 1801, iii. 385.

Burns opens with a simple descriptive stanza, quite in the convention of the peasant-poem, but giving no hint of the comedy to come. Like Fergusson, he meets with company—not one, but three ‘hizzies’ adorned for the fair. Two, later named Hypocrisy and Superstition, are doucely clad in ‘manteles o’ dolefu black’ for the godly business of the day. The third, as fair and brisk as the morning scene, is Fun, the poet’s ‘crony dear’. Mirth alone is the genius of Leith races; the more complex occasion of the holy fair needs a troop of three presiding spirits. The shift from Mirth to Fun is significant. Mirth is a respectable presence in many an Augustan allegory; there is a vulgar, unpredictable devilment about Fun.<sup>1</sup> Mirth and Fun, with Dunbar’s conductor in ‘The Thrissill and the Rois’ who was known to Fergusson and Burns from Ramsay’s *Ever Green* (1724), nicely illustrate the adaptation of a literary device to different needs and styles:

Dunbar’s May is a courtly lady . . . ; Fergusson’s Mirth, for all that she is ‘braw buskit laughing lass’, has obviously been in Fairy Land; Burns’s Fun is the complete country romp.<sup>2</sup>

Fun invites Burns to share the entertainment of the holy fair and drops behind. There follows a description, as in ‘Pebelis to the Play’ and ‘Leith Races’, of the gathering crowd on the road; and the whole range of their moods and interests is epitomised in the ‘gash’ farmers, the young ‘swankies . . . springan owre the gutters’, and ‘lasses, skelpen barefit . . . In silks an’ scarlets’ (vi, vii). The basic irony of the poem is then marked out (viii): the sight-seers, under the formidable eye of an elder, unwillingly add their two-pence to a collection-plate ‘weel heaped up with ha’pence’ and pass in, not to worship, but ‘to see the show’.

<sup>1</sup> ‘A low cant word’ (Johnson). Fielding’s Partridge was ‘a great lover of what is called fun, and a great promoter of those harmless quarrels which tend rather to the production of comical than tragical incidents’ (*Tom Jones*, 1749, IX. vi).

<sup>2</sup> M. P. McDiarmid in *Poems of Robert Fergusson*, STS, ii. 293. ‘On the failure of all three allegorical ladies to keep pace with their poets Dr. Johnson would certainly have passed some weighty remarks.’ But he would have been wrong. They serve their purpose, like Chaucer’s Affrican in *The Parlement of Foules* and the Eagle in *The Hous of Fame*, and are sensibly left behind.

side, the scene is worthy of Hogarth: a gathering of whores at the entry, a row of jades 'wi' heaving breasts an' bare neck', a catch of websters 'blackguarding frae Kilmarnock'—and the duly:

Here, some are thinkan on their sins,  
 An' some upo' their claes;  
 Ane curses feet that fyl'd his shins,  
 Anither sighs an' prays:  
 On this hand sits a Chosen swatch,<sup>1</sup>  
 Wi' screw'd up, grace-proud faces;  
 On that, a set o' chaps, at watch,  
 Thrang winkan on the lasses  
 To *chairs* that day. (ix, x)

The rhetorical antitheses reinforce the human antitheses. Stanza opens with a line from a metrical psalm, 'O happy is that man, blest!'; but the blessedness here is sensual. The happy man wraps his arm round a girl's neck, 'An's loof upon her *bosom*'; and with this satisfactory settlement, the first preaching begins.

In the preachings (xii–xxii) the medieval 'brawl' is metamorphosed. The protagonists are humorously named and distinguished; but their prowess is only rhetorical, and their contest is only in words. Burns draws brilliant sketches of five notable orators: Goodie, minister of Riccarton, preaching tidings of damnation with all the stops out—he was noted for reviling his flock with the text, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father will ye do' (John viii. 44); Smith, minister of Galston, a 'New Light' divine offering 'cauld harangues On *practice* and on *morals*'<sup>2</sup> as the godly are driven out to wet their thrapples at the tavern;<sup>2</sup> Rebbles, minister of Newton-on-Ayr, 'meek an' mim'; Miller, discreetly concealing his scepticism; and, after a cannily placed

*Swatch* was a common collective noun for the pious. With *at watch* compare innumerable uses of *watch* in the New Testament for vigilance in the face of temptation.

The moderate, moralising preachers of the new school, boring their congregation to drink, were known as *yuill* ministers; the eloquent evangelicals, holding theirs even from supper, were *kail-pat* preachers (see Graham, *op. cit.*, pp. 307–8). In his own countryside Burns finds illustrations of the whole range of ecclesiastical character.

interlude of argument and uproar over the ale, the celebrated Black Jock Russell of Kilmarnock:

But now the L——'s ain trumpet touts,  
Till a' the hills are rairan,  
An' echos back return the shouts;  
Black ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ is na spairan:

The *half asleep* start up wi' fear,  
An' think they hear [Hell] roaran,  
When presently it does appear,  
'Twas but some neebor *snoran*  
Asleep that day.

The metaphor in the first line is gravely biblical—'The great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish . . . and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem' (Isa. xxvii. 13); but there is a growing undertone of derision, from the verb 'touts' to the unjustified anxiety of the drowsy and the indifference of the unconscious. In two stanzas Burns deals destruction to this Boanerges, whose thunders at a holy fair near Glasgow demoralised the '*yill-caup* Commentators' in the ale-house: 'Every sound of revelry ceased in a moment; and the Bacchanals, half drunk as some of them were, were so cowed by what they heard as to steal out by a back window.'<sup>1</sup>

The pulpit-brawl over, the crowd turns to drink and food (xxiii-xxv), and the fair ends with a traditional picture of lovers going home. Burns gives this, in the context of piety and by the subtle interplay of spiritual and sensual language, a new satiric life:

At slaps\* the billies halt a blink,  
Till lasses strip their shoon:  
Wi' *faith* an' *hope*, an' *love* an' *drink*,  
They're a' in famous tune  
For crack† that day.

<sup>1</sup> From a letter by Hugh Miller, the geologist, excerpted in the *Burns Chronicle* xxxiv (1925), 79-80.

\* *gaps*      † *talk*

How monie hearts this day converts,  
 O' sinners and o' Lasses!  
 Their hearts o' stane, gin night are gane,  
 As saft as ony flesh is.  
 There's some are fou o' *love divine*;  
 There's some are fou o' *brandy*;  
 An' monie jobs that day begin,  
 May end in *Houghmagandie*‡  
 Some ither day.

The ambiguity of St. Paul's three theological virtues is made explicit by the addition of a fourth, drink, earlier celebrated (xix) as the source of wit, knowledge, and imagination. The final stanza elaborates the satiric ambivalence of theological terms—'a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart . . . and I will give you an heart of flesh' (Ez. xxxvi. 26); and through the antithesis of 'love divine' and 'brandy'<sup>1</sup> Burns reaches his climax in 'Houghmagandie'.<sup>2</sup>

The long tradition of the peasant-brawl reaches a new level of complexity, of satiric art and social significance, in 'The Holy Fair'. 'This was, indeed,' says Lockhart:

extraordinary performance: no partisan of any sect could whisper that malice formed its principal inspiration, or that its chief attraction lay in the boldness with which individuals, entitled and accustomed to respect, were held up to ridicule; it was acknowledged, amidst the sternest mutterings of wrath, that national manners were once more in the hands of a national poet; and . . . that the Muse of *Christ's Kirk on the Green* had awakened, after the slumber of ages.<sup>3</sup>

‡ *fornication*

Cf. *The Jolly Beggars*, ll. 221-2, 'Partly wi' love o'ercome sae sair, / And partly she was drunk.'

Following, much more subtly, Ramsay's addition to *Chrystis Kirk*. Cf. the song of *Airdrie Fair*, by W—— Y—— (Glasgow, 1792; to which Professor Nichol Smith has drawn my attention):

An' mony maidenheads are ta'en  
 Before the fair is ended  
 That cheary day.

*The Life of Robert Burns*, 1914, i. 93-4.

# *The Poet Hood*

EDMUND BLUNDEN

IN the year 1817 the young poet John Keats began to be a guest at the house of Mr. George Reynolds, writing-master of Christ's Hospital, London, and father of another young poet, John Hamilton Reynolds. The house was one of those in which new literature, although not too much of it, was taken seriously. Mrs. Reynolds, like her husband and her son, was an authoress, and four daughters assisted her in entertaining young writers who might be moved to express their gratitude in verse. Readers of Keats will not need to be reminded in detail of his poems originating in the Reynolds society, nor of his letters to the young ladies. But by the end of 1819 Keats, in his fashion, was discarding the latter; he might of course have returned happily to the house in Little Britain had he lived a few years more.

In 1820 a young Scot named Thomas Hood—aged twenty-one with some early prose and verse to his credit—joined the circle of Keats's publishers Taylor and Hessey, and made friends with their enigmatic but exhilarating author J. H. Reynolds. In this manner Hood became awhile the especial poet of the Reynolds family, and in 1825 he married Jane Reynolds, who still possessed letters from Keats. These simple facts may help to explain why Hood in his first determined attempts to make his name as a poet was so often a follower of Keats. Imitation was then a matter of personal inheritance. It is regrettable that it never occurred to Hood to put together such matter-of-fact reminiscences of his predecessor, 'the young Endymion', as even old George Reynolds could bring into conversations in Little Britain. But Hood's poetry at this stage is largely an offering to the genius of Keats.

It has always been difficult to segregate Hood's serious poems from his comic, but this choice has always been desired. Th

wildering punmanship which Hood had—and even here a reference to Keats is easy—can never be quite removed from the new of the poetry which he attained. What can be done with such a joker? May we perhaps be permitted not always to notice the ‘carrying double’, as in those lines from his ‘Ode to Melancholy’?

Even the bright extremes of joy  
Bring on conclusions of disgust,  
Like the sweet blossoms of the May,  
Whose fragrance ends in must.

Hood lived in an age when comic verse was in extraordinary demand; and, alas, he had to live by his pen. Engraving (he might be called a painter too, but an engraver he was by trade) was not enough. He was able without much trouble to supply the times with humorous metrical yarns in the manner of Peter Pindar, and volery in lyrical form equal to anything by the Dibdin family or the brothers Smith. One advantage of that economic practice is that in his collected poems we have a multitude of details defining the England he knew, and elucidating its literature.

Hood's earliest book, *Odes and Addresses to Great People* (1825), was shared with his brother-in-law, John Reynolds, another poet who sold his wit in sporting magazines and in theatrical scripts. Even in this book, crammed with exclamation marks to make sure that the dear reader does not miss the play upon words, Keats's ghost walks. The ‘Ode to the Great Unknown’—containing some enchanting marginalia to the Waverley Novels—ends with an echo from, of all poems, the ‘Grecian Urn’:

Be still a shade, and when this age is fled,  
When we poor sons and daughters of reality  
Are in our graves forgotten and quite dead. . . .

Identically the word ‘echo’ is not completely just to young Hood, an intelligent artist, enjoying his opportunity of contributing to the Movement. When he was given a sort of assistant-editorship to Taylor and Hessey's *London Magazine*, he was raised to the seventh heaven. The only man missing from the team (apart from

Sir Walter Scott, but that was that) was poor Keats. Hood's inventiveness did not stop him from elaborate exercises in the manner of 'Elia' especially, and indeed he at last made Lamb angry by signing Lamb's name to a fabrication which had an unlucky effect on respectable readers. Among these prose imitations, or variations, one of the most dexterous is based on 'Old China'.

But Little Britain, where Keats had shone more than perhaps he perceived, was Hood's home from home. His rhymes sent to the ladies tell us what a familiarity was granted—yet with Keats still often over the scene. This copy of 'Endymion', this picture of 'Hero and Leander', this album with quite a variety of young poets in it, even this bunch of faded flowers from Devonshire—in a hundred instances Keats was with him. Even his reading went the way of Keats, and Lamb; the subject of Hero and Leander had been made English mainly by Marlowe and Chapman, poets beloved by both the Londoners mentioned, and Shakespeare considered primarily as a poet was duly read and re-read. In 1827 Hood interrupted his series of comic publications with his *Plea of the Midsummer Fairies*, a determined ascent of Parnassus. Dedications to Lamb, Coleridge, and Reynolds marked the occasion; and Odes to Autumn, to Melancholy, to the Moon ('clustered by all thy family of stars') were among the homages to John Keats.

Hood's first book of serious verse was a failure in point of book-selling, but will not easily be disturbed in its place among poetic achievements. The best thing in it, in spite of such sonnets as 'Silence' and 'It is not Death', is the high-spirited title-poem, wherein Hood holds splendidly that by writing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare saved Fairyland from destruction; it is a poem in the manner of the age, where 'glib Mab' and 'prompt mushrooms' and 'dainty eglantine' are easily said. Hood was apparently at this stage a book-reader rather than an observer, but the poets who have from the beginning collected their imagery out of the actual world about them, to answer all their needs as writers for the public, are few. Hood in his volume of 1827 included a formerly famous lyric, not derived from others:

I remember, I remember,  
 The house where I was born,  
 The little window where the sun  
 Came peeping in at morn.  
 He never came a wink too soon,  
 Nor brought too long a day,  
 But now, I often wish the night  
 Had borne my breath away.

Do we hear one of the Reynolds girls at the piano, while Thomas carries the words down, in 1825?)

Even in this collection *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies*, Hood's youthful poetry, the shadow of death is strangely urgent. Keats had died of consumption: Hood was consumptive: but may the cause of the younger poet's melancholy have been something deeper? He was terrible, we know, in his drawings and engravings, which for years he offered to the British public in annual volumes, under the heading of wit and humour! This gentle spirit, viewed through those spectacles, is a monster; pain and shock are for him not only jesters. It would be interesting to ascertain at what date the tinted drawing 'The Waterspout', exhibited in the wonderful Blake bicentenary exhibition in 1957, was made; it reminded me, I may refer to such personal matters, of being suddenly 'shelled' on the once innocent slopes of the valley of the river Ancre beyond Amiens, in 1916.

In *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* Hood follows Keats as a student and an interpreter of classical mythology. He is an excellent follower, and it is no injustice to call him that, for when, for example, he is uplifting his Ode to the Moon, he is glad of a 'line' from Keats addressing Psyche. Hood's reflections are not without precedent:

Oh, thou art beautiful, howe'er it be!  
 Huntress, or Dian, or whatever nam'd;  
 And he, the veriest Pagan, that first fram'd  
 A silver idol, and ne'er worshipp'd thee!—  
 It is too late, or thou should'st have my knee;  
 Too late now for the old Ephesian vows,  
 And not divine the crescent on thy brows!

The source in Keats's Ode is visible enough:

O latest born and loveliest vision far  
Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy. . . .

O brightest! though too late for antique vows,  
Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,—

but altogether Hood, no classical scholar, studied under Keats the mythologist.

The book was the most interesting collection by an English poet to appear in the year 1827, despite *Poems by Two Brothers* signifying that the Tennysons were beginning, and Clare's *Shepherd's Calendar* which continued his rural description, Darley's often brilliant *Sylvia*, and good John Keble's ingenious *Christian Year*. Yet possibly Keats had been as great a disadvantage to Hood as a benefit. The 'Ode to Autumn' (there were three Autumn poems), opens as if Keats's page was being supplied with a variant; 'Where are the Songs of Summer?' is a question which need not have been asked just then, even though the ideal forms of Keats are not merely copied when Hood writes:

I saw old Autumn in the misty morn  
Stand shadowless like Silence, listening  
To silence.

Presently the 'Ode to Melancholy' from the *Lamia* volume captures Hood's composing mind, as it did more than once, but what he might attain in free imagination is apparent in the lines:

all the wither'd world looks drearily,  
Like a dim picture of the drownèd past  
In the hush'd mind's mysterious far away,  
Doubtful what ghostly thing will steal the last  
Into that distance, grey upon the grey.

Here let us recall the appreciative voice of T. G. Wainewright, of the aforesaid *London Magazine* and its happy contributors' parties; for he did not wait until 1827, when these had ceased, to

press Hood under a pen-name in that Magazine. He refers already, in 1823, to the poem 'Lycus the Centaur', which once more is a Keatsian product among the others in Hood's volume of 1827. Wainewright was a prophetic critic:

Young Theodore! young in years, not in power! Our new Ovid!<sup>1</sup>—only more imaginative! Painter to the visible eye and the inward; commixture of the superficial deem incongruous elements! Instructive living proof, how they lie the founts of laughter and tears! Thou fermenting brain, oppress'd as by its own riches. Though melancholy would seem to have touched thy heart with her painful (salutary) hand, yet is thy fancy mercurial, undepressed, sparkles and crackles more from the contact, as the northern lights when near the frozen Pole. How! is the fit not on? Still is "Lycus" without mate? Who can mate him but thyself! Let not the shallow induce thee to conceal thyself. . . . As for thy word-gambols, thy humour, thy fantastics, thy curiously excited-perceptions of similarity in dissimilarity, of coherents in incoherents, they are brilliant suave, innocuously exhilarating; but not a step farther, if thou dost thy proper peace!

Though few might understand Hood's poetry with its graceful abundant suggestions of Keats and Shakespeare, or relate his own idea of what it should concern to that which had recently governed the work of Keats, it must have been clear to him soon after 1827 that the beautiful was to some extent ineffectual among readers as they were then. The age was still attracted by the tale of the giant, and he, like Dickens soon becoming the favourite of the multitude, had an imagination for that side of things. In 1829 he published his ballad 'The Dream of Eugene Aram', a murder story, known to him because a friend, one of the murderer's accomplices, had heard Aram talk of the business. It is to Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner' that Hood owes something of the simple intensity of his new style in this surprising poem. The luxuriant ornament is gone; the 'confession' of Aram is delivered like bullet for bullet. But then Hood records that he had himself gone through practically all Aram's misery in an 'unaccountable vision' in his own sleep.

Hood published his poem *The Two Peacocks of Bedford*, a metamorphosis, two ladies transformed into yew-trees shaped like peacocks, in the *London Magazine* of October 1822 over the humorous signature 'Ovid'.

'Eugene Aram' attained some popularity, far beyond the idyllic stories and odes. It was, still, a dream-poem, and Hood had others to write, almost to the last hour when he could write anything. 'The Elm Tree: a Dream in the Woods' and 'The Haunted House: a Romance', both longish poems, appeared in 1842 and 1844; he died in 1845. These creations of fancy, or apprehension of the ghost world, are Hood's as completely as any literary work is one author's. The contrast between the innocent freedom of wild nature, which has found in him a new observer, and the psychic tyranny of deadly presences, is sustained with unborrowed detail and phrase:

O'er all there hung a shadow and a fear,  
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,  
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,  
The place is Haunted!

Again there was a response to Hood's spectral invitation, and it did not die away for many years, but these poems are not for everybody; not enough 'happens'.

To specify a change, or another potency, in Hood's poetical work, which insisted on his faithful diligence right through the topical and whimsical pennings necessary to his family's subsistence, turn the page to 'Miss Kilmansegg and her Precious Legacy: A Golden Legend'. Another long poem, another fantasy—and what is Hood at this time? It is a grotesque, a grim and pitiless satire on wealth; into it the poet pours his wit and art bewilderingly; if rhyming makes meaning, never was more meaning flung forth stanza after stanza. The end is cruel. The word (the punning word) 'legend' cannot undo that; and we wonder how Hood has become so bitter. But his struggle with adversity, and sometimes roguery, may partly explain it; and his parable of social inequality had its full share of things as they were.

The habit of Hood in his comic verse was to pound away at his listener, and in his 'Miss Kilmansegg' he keeps it up with ability but with superfluity. The word 'gold' or 'golden' is indeed at the bottom of the murder which he describes, but one may say that he has 'damnable iteration' and exhausts the attention.

At Christmas 1843 Hood brought out a poem hardly to be expected at that feast, but instantly applauded, his 'Song of the Shirt'; and in May 1844 he followed it with 'The Bridge of Sighs', which also seized a numerous audience. Hood became a famous man. The matter rather than the manner of these two great lyrics explains their success, to some extent: they came in an age of protest, and one exposes the miseries of cheap labour, the other the fate of the 'unfortunate'; in both poems the victim is a woman. The writing is shorn of its poeticism, the metre is hammered into the mind—but most in the 'Song of the Shirt' with its origin in mechanical toil without love or hope:

Work—Work—Work!  
 From weary chime to chime,  
     Work—Work—Work—  
 As prisoners work for crime!  
     Band, and gusset, and seam,  
     Seam, and gusset, and band,  
 Till the heart is sick, and the brain benumb'd,  
     As well as the weary hand.

At this point then the former lover of enchanted gardens and sweet words had come, as a poet; he may yet have had Keats with him, leading him even to this 'fighting verse' and cold rage. He rarely dwelt, as time passed, on those stanzas in 'Isabella' which turn for a moment from the narrative itself to the picture of the excesses of wealth and commerce in their harshest forms. That he thought much about his poetry as a whole, and about the direction in which he should take as a poet, it would be hard to assert; but that his imagination returned from dreams to realities in his later years is shown by several short poems besides the two now famous, and so often chosen by anthologists.

A contemporary poet of eminence once wrote that he was forewarned by 'the witty and the tender Hood'. But Hood could attack manners and customs that he did not like with a formidable directness. The 'fighting verse' was exercised not only on such dark and widespread social abuses as 'The Song of the Shirt' and 'The



# George Moore and the Novel

GRAHAM HOUGH

GEORGE MOORE was born a little over a hundred years ago, and in just this lapse of time it often happens that a writer has slipped out of the immediate literary consciousness without yet acquiring a place in history. This appears to be Moore's present situation. Though he went on writing until 1928, he lies under the cloud that obscures the *fin-de-siècle*. But Moore's period is the period when the English imagination was being profoundly influenced by the literary experiments of France. It is emerging from a long imputation of ninetyish triviality; whatever we come to think of its actual achievement it can only be seen now as an important chapter of literary history—the introductory chapter, in fact, to the history that is still being enacted; and with it George Moore himself is bound to emerge from his obscurity. Perhaps there is a feeling that George Moore, the hero of a hundred anecdotes, is not wholly serious. There have indeed been enough queries about him, and rather than adding to their number it would be worth while to inquire why a writer with such a massive achievement behind him should up to now never quite have made his mark. Most of the reasons will turn out to be poor ones; but on the way it should be possible to discover something about what his achievement really was. For this is by no means easy to determine.

Of course he himself made it difficult. He issued his work in limited editions, produced endless revised versions, treated himself as the author of a sacred scripture, admitting some works to canon, and casting others out into the apocryphal darkness. This has made it very hard for the common reader, that final arbiter of literary reputation, to form any clear image of him. In

England especially we like our writers to have well-defined personalities that can be recognised in their work, like those of Dr. Johnson, Charles Lamb or Bernard Shaw. But George Moore let fall the truth about himself in these words from *Confessions of a Young Man*:

I came into the world apparently with a nature like a smooth sheet of wax, bearing no impress, but capable of receiving any. Nor am I exaggerating when I say I think I might equally have been a Pharaoh, an ostler, a pimp, an archbishop; and that in the fulfilment of the duties of each a certain measure of success would have been mine.

Moore achieved as much deliberate self-exhibition as any writer since Rousseau; yet he remains fluid, without outlines, just as he looks in his portrait by Sickert. We can learn something of him by thinking of the diversity of his ambitions; to ride the winner of the Grand National; to paint like Manet; to write like Zola; to be a great lover; to write like Flaubert, Balzac; to be a man of the world; to be an Irish patriot; to write like Landor; to write like Pater. . . Most of these represent full-time jobs, quite incompatible with each other. Steeplechasing, riding the winner of the Grand National and painting like Manet disappeared pretty early: being a great lover, a man of the world, an Irish patriot, hung around rather longer: gradually, writing emerged as the main stream of his life. Merely writing, literature; not founding a school, or disseminating ideas, or influencing society. So that in his old age we see a galaxy of creations—and if we try to look through them to their creator, we see only a ghost who has long ago given his flesh and his substance to his works. This waif, this wisp, this near-absurdity that confronts us is what is left of a man whose authentic life was given to the asceticism of the arts. This kind of asceticism has never been much appreciated in English civilisation.

Rather than looking for the man behind the work it would be useful to look at the historical situation. What were the possibilities for a young novelist in the latter years of the nineteenth century? We must look at France as well as England to explain Moore: but as it happens the answer is the same for both. He

ould continue the tradition of English realism—the rich accumulation of factual particulars, with a strong bias towards social, even biological interpretation. What had lately become a method and dogma in France had in an unselfconscious and limited way always been a large component of English fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Or he could begin to develop an almost tried form, the novel of sensibility which neglects the outer definition for the inner, and instead of aiming at objectivity and information, sees the whole through the coloured medium of the author's temperament or through the temperament of some character in the work who becomes for the time being the author's aesthetic representative.

Moore chose realism; very Zola-esque in *A Mummer's Wife*; infinitely more human and generous in that great novel *Esther Waters*. But a great French novel rather than a great English novel. Though it is about servants' halls, racing stables, lodging houses and pubs, it has little of the smell of English literature. English social portraiture has been strongly tinged with a sort of bourgeois romanticism. Moore complained that the English novelists refused to learn that life is neither jocular nor melodramatic. The world of *Esther Waters* is neither; and it has a sober fidelity to facts as they are, that brings it nearer to Flaubert than to the typical English writers, Fielding and Dickens. Fidelity to some of the facts, at least; for English life is really rather jocular; and when it consents to be dramatic at all, it is as likely as not to be melodramatic. But Moore, as an Irishman trained in France, would hardly realise this. He reserves his humour for the practical purpose of annoying his friends, and disdains to put it in his novels, where it could only mar the texture.

The autobiographies—*Confessions of a Young Man*, *Hail and Farewell*, *Memoirs of my Dead Life*—have probably been most read. Gossip is always popular, and if it is malicious gossip, so much the better. Moore lost many friends by it, and hurt some delicate sensibilities: but there is not really much vice in him, and there is no doubt that he elevated this rather dubious form to the level of a work of art—a work of art whose nature has perhaps not been

very well understood. What he is really doing is writing a sparkling, desultory chronicle whose central figure happens to be called George Moore; and for his other characters he makes free with other actual persons. As a historical record it is probably wrong; as a way of treating one's friends it is certainly shabby; aesthetically it is a success. Some of his victims, anyway, gave as good as they got; Yeats, in the course of a brilliant satirical portrait, revealed that Moore was so unpractical that he had never even discovered how to keep his underpants from slipping down.

This damaging revelation from a fellow-Irishman is satisfactory to lovers of poetic justice, for Moore owed a great deal to Yeats. *Evelyn Innes*, that fine novel which was later expunged from the canon, is dedicated to Yeats; and I have always supposed that the figure of Ulick Dean the musician is partly drawn from him. And when the possibilities of realism seemed to be exhausted, Yeats carried Moore off to Ireland and involved him in the Irish literary movement; and association with Yeats recalled another part of his French experience, hitherto unused—what he had learned from the symbolists.

What he had learnt from the symbolists was no doubt only a fragment of that mass of poetic theorising at which he must have assisted. Moore's capacity for dealing with ideas was always conspicuously limited. But he had at least absorbed the concept of the work of art as a self-subsistent entity, explicable in its own terms, responsible to its own being, rather than to some reality outside itself. It would seem that the Irish-Yeatsian reactivation of symbolist discussions was the turning point in Moore's literary life. The stories in *The Untilled Field*, the short novel *The Lake*, are indeed a portrait of Ireland, intimate because he had been born and bred there, fresh because he was a returned traveller; but they are also a movement into an entirely new literary territory—new to Moore and new to English fiction—where the beauty, harmony and integrity of the words on the page is a more important consideration than their efficacy in representing an outer reality. A transference in fact, from what Mallarmé had called *l'état brut de la parole* to *l'état essentiel*.

The most notable aspect of these Irish tales is a linguistic one. Moore claimed that his handling of the Irish idiom in *The Untilled Land* served as a model for J. M. Synge; and this may be true. The tales were written to be translated into Gaelic, as part of a programme for supplying literature in the vernacular. And since they were to appear in another tongue, it was no use to attempt variety, or sharp contrasts of style, the setting off of one character's speech against another, all the tricks of 'characterisation' that the great Victorian novelists had employed so lavishly. Moore had never been very successful in this (he had no real command of common English speech); and here it would be useless; translation obliterates these distinctions.

Instead he looks for a neutral harmony, a style where all will be in keeping. Among his former friends the painters the greatest one had been a passage that was out of tone: he now begins to apply the same lesson to literature. What most upsets the harmony in a work of fiction? Natural dialogue, surely. Characters who insist on talking in Cockney, in society slang, in the dialect of an unimpeachable class or time; whose style refuses to relate itself to that of the author's own reflections. Some of the more self-conscious Victorian novelists had been half aware of this problem already, and kept their servants and the rustics from speaking on that account.

Henry James did not formulate the matter in these terms, but there can be little doubt that it was real to him. The fine intelligence that he requires at the centre of his novels is no doubt there primarily as a moral discriminator; but the restriction of his principal characters to persons of unusual sensibility and perception presents ultimately a stylistic demand—a demand that all shall be in keeping. When the essential *dramatis personae* make this stylistically impossible, he has recourse to a frank convention. The characters in *The Turn of the Screw* talk like Henry James.

All this could hardly have appeared as a problem at any earlier period in the history of fiction. After Flaubert, after the aesthetic doctrine of the succeeding generation, the requirement that a novel should not only represent something, but should be something, raises the level of deliberate awareness. It becomes difficult for

the scrupulous novelist to remain content with using language in a mainly referential way, to be satisfied if he points to the right things, no matter by what verbal instrumentality the pointing is done. We are already within sight of the dual allegiance of the early Joyce—the allegiance at once to ‘realism’ and to ‘beauty’. And the great obstacle to the *claritas* and *consonantia* that go to constitute beauty, was the novel’s inevitably mixed form. I put this in the past tense, for manifestly the technical situation has now changed; but as the novel stood at the end of the nineteenth century it was always a mixed form—a mixture of narrative for which the author makes himself directly responsible, and dialogue, for which he delegates responsibility to his characters. The situation is not new—it prevails in the epic, as Plato was the first to remark. The narrative and the dramatic methods are always potentially at war. We have glanced at James’s solution in passing, and this is not the place even to touch on the varied experiments of the last forty years. Moore’s solution is different, and to see it in its developed form we have to look at the last group of novels: *The Brook Kerith* and *Heloise and Abelard* are the chief.

The first thing one notices about these books is the enormously long unbroken paragraphs, giving a repellently solid appearance to the page. However, they are not what they appear, stretches of unbroken narrative. They are interspersed with conversations, sometimes between two, sometimes between several people; but the indentations and the inverted commas have been suppressed. This is not a mere typographical device, for with a little further investigation we notice that an unbroken rhythm runs through the whole paragraph, narrative and dialogue alike. That is, the peculiarities of individual utterance have been sacrificed to the harmony of the whole. Just the slightest of gestures is made in the direction of naturalism and characterisation; the characters do not all speak alike, there are suggestions of colloquialism and dialect—but only so much as will allow the musical line to run continuously through a whole passage, as it does, for instance, in the enchanting opening of *The Brook Kerith*:

as at the end of a summer evening, long after his usual bedtime, that he, sitting on his grandmother's knee, heard her tell that Kish having lost his asses sent Saul, his son, to seek them in the land of the Benjamites and the land of Shalisha, whither they might have strayed. But they were not in these lands, Son, she continued, nor in Zulp, whither Saul went afterwards, and being tired out with looking for them, he said to the servant: We shall do well to forget the asses, lest my father should ask what has become of us. But the servant, being of a mind that Kish would not care to see them without the asses, said to young Saul: Let us go up into yon city, for a great seer lives there and he will be able to put us in the right way to come upon the asses.

Though the date of *The Brook Kerith* is 1916, that is not a modern prose style; far less so than that of *A Mummer's Wife* or *Confessions* of thirty years before. And *The Brook Kerith* and *Heloise and Abelard* are remarkably unlike most modern novels.

It is natural to begin by talking of George Moore's subjects, but I shall continue by talking of his manner of presentation; for in the earlier books the manner of presentation has become the subject in a way that the novel previously had hardly known. Of course certain areas of human experience are inevitably represented—in

*Brook Kerith* a notoriously challenging one; the life of Jesus treated as a purely natural and human chronicle. The carpenter's son does not die on the cross, but lives on in hiding. And the tremendous climax comes when, years later, Paul, preaching Christ crucified, is confronted by the still living Jesus. Now if Moore had still been thinking on the lines of the conventional novel the whole plot would have been concentrated on this point; but it is not. It wanders through the Syrian landscape, follows the fortunes of Joseph of Arimathea, lingers among the different sects and faiths of Palestine. *Heloise and Abelard* makes the same sort of varied leisurely progress through twelfth-century France. Moore has no historical axe to grind; he shows people living as they do behave; alike, in his view, in the first century and in the twelfth, or the nineteenth. There are startling anachronisms, there are digressions and inserted show-pieces, but they do not really matter, the true object of attention throughout is the sustained, slightly soporific texture of the prose, capable of

absorbing into itself all the diversities of experience with which it deals.

Moore acknowledged Landor and Pater as his masters, and the writing does remind us of both. But he has given himself a harder task than theirs, for Pater's people do not converse, they only reflect or make set speeches; and Landor's do not act and only occasionally feel. George Moore's triumph is to have combined vividness of presentation with a prose whose rhythm and texture is itself beautiful to contemplate. At this point it will almost certainly be objected that whatever this achievement is worth it has not much to do with the novel. Serious criticism of the novel of late has been so inveterately moralistic that we have been hectored into discussing all works of fiction almost exclusively in terms of just moral discrimination—even if little has been done to show by what standards the justice is assessed. What has been said about Moore's most characteristic achievement has plainly nothing to do with this line of approach. Yet the conscientious contemplator of the novel must give a great deal of weight to this moral approach, not as a moralist himself, for he may make no such pretensions, but because the sphere of the novel is in part the same as that of the moralist—it is the sphere of human conduct, particularly conduct in its social relations. This is true of the novel in a sense that it is not of other forms—of the lyric for instance, whose characteristic material is the moment of apprehension, given, unanalysed, immediate, and therefore morally neutral; of tragedy, whose philosophic analogue is not ethics but metaphysics. There is a general sense in which everything man makes is implicated with his moral experience; but the novel is implicated with it in a special sense as well. And our account of George Moore so far has not touched on this aspect of his work at all, has hardly even suggested that it is there to be touched on. If this were all that is to be said it could well be argued that Moore was an interesting minor experimenter in certain narrative techniques, and that as a novelist he had hardly started.

But of course this is not the whole story about Moore. He tried to choose subjects almost as a decorative painter might try to

ose suitable architectural sites for the exhibition of his craft; whether he would or not, his subjects involved him with life, with an immense variety of human experience. And here we begin to perceive a divergence, a divergence which we might expect, but in Moore's case it is a particularly wide one, between the social personality and the artist. In spite of his exhibitionism, in spite of his faults in taste, in spite, it would appear, of a personal lack of any adequate philosophy, there is in his work a great moral integrity. One doubts if he ever thought about it, and in his best novels it becomes apparent in a singularly effortless and unforced way. We demand a justness of moral perception from the novel, and we believe that a good novel could not exist without it any more than a beautiful woman could exist without a backbone. But it is in virtue of her backbone that she is beautiful; nor is it necessary that she or those who appreciate her beauty should call constant attention to the possession of this indispensable piece of equipment. Moore's work has a moral backbone; it is not in the possession of this that it achieves its peculiar kind of success, but it is nevertheless there, and it is as well to end by insisting on it, for it is in this matter (through the combined skill as caricaturists of himself and his friends) that he is commonly thought to be deficient.

This moral integrity of his work is one that owes much to his early realist training, and, strangely enough, owes something to the insouciance and irresponsibility that puzzles us in his life. Moore has none of the twentieth-century maladies; he does not suffer from anxiety, or a sense of guilt, or the plight of modern man. (I doubt if he knew we were in one.) So his characters are not coloured by any overwhelming emotional tincture of his own. This makes him very unlike most modern novelists; but it also means that he can see people simply as they are. So that he becomes a superb recorder, quite irrespective of his own sentiments and opinions. We have the paradox that this renegade Catholic, who had rejected all the forms and all the philosophy of the Church, gives in *Evelyn Innes* the superbly understanding sympathy of a woman irresistibly drawn to the religious life: that the

callous young arriviste of the *Confessions*, who called pity the vilest of the virtues, can show the grave sympathy for the common lot that runs through *Esther Waters*: that the hero of all the facile sexual success stories should give, in *Heloise and Abelard*, the infinitely touching story of a love that ends, on this side of the grave, in emptiness and frustration. On the one hand, Moore is the incomparable painter of the world before the deluge; love, sunshine, Paris in the spring; the simple sensual happiness that seems to have vanished from our hag-ridden age; the verbal counterpart of a painting by Renoir. On the other, he can turn a steady gaze on the dramas of asceticism and renunciation. It is hard to believe that *Sister Teresa* and *The Lovers of Orelay* were written by the same man; and it is only possible because the author stands aside; he is not committed; he simply observes and understands. Objective, impersonal comprehension of this kind becomes at its highest pitch a kind of charity. Moore the artist possessed this gift; what he did with it when he was off duty I do not know: but I believe that its presence in his works will be more perceived as the personal legend about him begins to fade.

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# *Metre*

C. S. LEWIS

It seems clear to me that questions like 'How does this line scan?' or 'What is the metre of this poem?' are not questions of the same sort as 'What is bronze?' This is a question about a physical fact. But the only physical facts about which a metrical question could be put are presumably phonetic facts. And when we ask how a line scans we cannot be asking simply for the phonetic facts which occur when it is pronounced. For:

If the scansion of a line meant all the phonetic facts, no two lines would scan the same way, for no two different lines are phonetically identical. If, on the other hand, we are asking only for some of the phonetic facts then we must want those which are relevant. But to what? Clearly, not to phonetic fact but to something else.

Individuals differ in their pronunciation of a line. Even a single individual can hardly pronounce it twice in exactly the same way. If scansion meant physically phonetic fact no line could scan twice in the same way.

Are we then asking not how this or that individual reads the line aloud but how he ought to?

Unfortunately, even when we have ruled out gross barbarisms, there remain different and defensible ways of reading poetry aloud and they do not coincide with differences of opinion about metre. The two main schools may be called Minstrels and Actors. They differ about the proper relation between the noises they make and something else; that something else being the thing we are looking for, namely metre. Minstrels, singing or intoning, make their utterance conform to this, leaving you to imagine the rhythm and tempo which the words would have in ordinary speech. Actors

give you that rhythm and tempo out loud, leaving you to imagine the metre. Yet both may be fully agreed as to what the metre is. They differ by deliberately making, or refusing to make, an imaginary archetype or paradigm actual. This paradigm is metre. Scansion is the conformity, made audible by Minstrels and concealed by Actors, of the individual line to this paradigm.

When we ask for the metre of a poem we are asking for the paradigm. But, again, what sort of question is this? If one man describes our Blank Verse paradigm in terms of 'feet' and another in terms of crotchets and quavers, what sort of difference is the difference between them?

We cannot, or should not, be asking how the poet himself would have described it. As regards the greater part of the world's poetry we do not know the answer to this. And even when poets have told us how they analysed their own metres, it is always open to us to say that their analysis was wrong, that their instinct or genius enabled them to produce what their often limited analytical powers did not enable them to understand.

Our results are so far discouraging. I am therefore going to suggest that metrical questions are profitable only if we regard them, not as questions about fact, but as purely practical. That is, when we ask 'What is the metre of this poem', we are not, or should not be, asking which analysis of the paradigm is 'true' but which is the most useful. The utility of the analysis would, I submit, be in a direct ratio to the degree in which it gives those who adopt it the following powers:

- (1) To say whether, so far as metre goes, a given line could or could not have occurred in a given poem.
- (2) To quote any line, if not correctly, yet certainly without any *metricidal* error.
- (3) Within any poem to distinguish normal from irregular lines.
- (4) To detect textual corruption by the damage it has done to metre.
- (5) To teach the metre quickly and easily to others.

That hardly any of our modern students possess these powers every university teacher knows.

such is my conception of a good—or even ‘the right’—analysis. How are we to achieve it?

The first rule is ‘Avoid the Inductive Method’. It sounds very sensible to say: ‘let us not be *a priori*. Instead of bringing to the actual lines some arbitrary idea of what is Regular, let us stick to facts—what the poet actually wrote. Let us, without any prejudice, tabulate all the types of line we find in the poem and then, inductively, construct the paradigm to cover them, to *save the appearances*.’ This commends itself to a scientific age. But surely it is quite fatal?

For if you proceed thus you will have no irregular lines at all. Your inductive paradigm ‘gets them in’, they have become regular. That is, they are specimens of alternatives, though rather the ones, among those which the paradigm prescribes. In fact, they are like Virgil’s *procumbit humi bos*, which does not break the metrical paradigm at all but fulfils it in an unusual way.

But that is not what irregular lines do in English poetry. A poem in Latin hexameters where every single line ended in a monosyllable would be a very bad poem but it would still be unmistakably in hexameters. Similarly if Shelley’s ‘The weight of the superincumbent hour’<sup>1</sup> were really one of the alternatives allowed in Shelley’s paradigm, then a whole poem in such lines, though a bad poem, ought to be still a poem in the metre of *Adonais*. If this line fulfils the paradigm, no succession of such lines could break it.

Well, try:

The weight of the superincumbent hour,  
The blows of a darkly returning power,  
The roll of the breakers and (while we speak)  
The glare of the sun on a faded flower,  
The blight of the moon on a fevered cheek.

This is not the metre of *Adonais* at all. Worse still, it is a metre: a quite different one. So with Milton’s ‘Burnt after them to the bottomless pit’.<sup>2</sup> Add ‘Hell then received the unfortunate crew’

*Adonais*, 283.

*Paradise Lost*, VI, 866.

and a few more such lines and you will get a new and perfectly recognisable (though detestable) metre.

Inductively constructed paradigms thus fail because they 'cover the facts' *too well*. A formula which accommodates all the actual lines accommodates lines which, if repeated, would not be in the metre of the poem. We must adopt exactly the opposite procedure. We must not begin with individual lines, nor even with classified types of line. We must begin with the whole poem. That, if it is any good, will teach you the tune, the pattern, the paradigm. It is only in relation to this that the lines are lines at all.

The paradigm is theoretically, or ostensibly, or by legal fiction, or by make-believe, obeyed in every single line. In many lines it is actually obeyed. The continual approximations to and recessions from actual obedience, as of waves on a beach, make much of the excellence of any long poem. If you once start monkeying with the paradigm so as to 'get in' all the lines, this beauty is lost. One does not want the shore as well as the sea to be in motion.

The irregular lines are those in which the make-believe is strained to the utmost point. 'The weight of the superincumbent hour' is feigned to be, or deemed to be, 'The weight of thé supér-incumbent hóur'; and 'Burnt after them to the bottomless pit', to be 'Burnt áfter thém to thé bottómless pít'. Of course not even the hardest Minstrel would so read them. But equally the hardest Actor is not appreciating them as verse at all unless his inner ear still hears the inner metronome ticking away. It has been set ticking by all the thousands of decasyllabic lines he has ever read.

If it ceased to tick, nearly all the merit of such lines would vanish. In Shelley's, the very laboriousness of the suggested pronunciation (thé supérincumbent) symbolises the burden of the hour; in Milton's, the denial, in fact, of the accents suggested by the metronome gives the sense of falling into a void.

When it comes to defining the paradigm, say, of decasyllabic verse, I do not see how we can avoid saying that each line contains five units of some sort. We do not of course mean, as some apparently think, that the poet 'built them up' out of such units as a bricklayer builds a wall out of pre-existing bricks. Nor do we

n that any reader makes pauses between these units in pronunciation. We mean that wherever the paradigm is completely analysed, analysis cannot help finding that certain phonetic configurations occur five times in the line.

Much metrical controversy is concerned merely with nomenclature; whether we should talk about these units as 'feet' or in some other language. Here again I maintain that we should be guided by utility.

Musical notation I would rule out at once. Book-lovers will not like the look, nor publishers the cost, of a page all spotted over with musical notation. Nor will it be of any use to readers of poetry unless they are also musicians.

The stock argument against calling the units by classical names (—or, in particular, *iambi*, *trochees*, and the rest) is that they are not really the same as the units of ancient verse. And even if we tell the student that the so-called English iambus is not to be confused with the quantitative iambus, he will in fact be encouraged to read Latin poetry in the wrong way. This has certainly done much harm to schoolboys in the past. They have been allowed to think that Virgil's hexameters ended with the tempo of 'strawberry jam-pot', when they were probably most like 'All men have idols'—in fact, more like the slow movement of the Seventh Symphony and less like the *Walkürenritt*.

But it will be noticed that the whole danger here is not to the student's English, but to his Latin, reading. This was certainly true in my own experience. Metrics of this type spoiled my appreciation of Latin poetry for years; I have never been able to find that they did my English studies anything but good. But if this is so, then the main objection to the classical nomenclature in English poetics is already out of date. We need not be afraid of encouraging our pupils to read Latin wrongly because we know they are not going to read Latin at all. We need no precaution against corns in a man who has already had both his legs amputated at the hip.

If this being so, it is surely time to re-avail ourselves of the enormous advantages which the classical terms offer. They are as follows:

(1) If you talk of feet everyone knows what you mean. Do not be deceived by those purists who will reply, 'I never know what people mean by a foot in connection with English verse'. That's only their fun. They know perfectly well that you mean the things which come seven times in a fourteeners, five times in a blank verse line, and four times in an octosyllabic. If, on the other hand, you devise what you take to be a more scientific language, you will never in discussing this or that line (outside your own book) be able to use it without explanation. Even if it won universal acceptance it would be swept away by the next, and even purer, purist. Almost any agreed terminology is better than a perpetual reformation.

(2) If I am allowed to use all the classical names I can describe shortly and clearly nearly all the metrical phenomena in English verse. If I may not speak of Choriambics I must take endless trouble to write, and you to read, any reference to what is happening in 'This, this is he; softly awhile . . . or do my eyes misrepresent?' (*Samson Agonistes*, 115-124).

(3) It enables us to present paradigms hard, jejune, dry, as paradigms ought to be, uninfected by questions of beauty. We need metrics if we are to become fully sensitive to poetry, as we need grammar before we can enjoy Homer and anatomy before we can draw. But the less these studies get mixed up with 'sensibility' the more they will ultimately do for it.

(4) Have you ever had a pupil *not* brought up on this scheme who was aware of metre at all? We are coming to acquiesce in a hair-raising barbarism on this subject. I have met an undergraduate who, after reading it, thought *The Prelude* was written in Spenserian Stanzas. Hardly one out of five Honours candidates can quote three or four lines of blank verse without false lineation. Every day we hear Donne praised for startling metrical audacity in passages where the metre is as regular as anyone else's. It is plain that our present methods do not work. Might we not go back to one that did?

# *Some Translations and the New Public*

J. M. COHEN

POET or novelist frequently arises in advance of his public; a translator never. It took a century for Blake, Stendhal, and Goethe to find their readers, and ten or twenty years for Joyce, Proust, Mallarmé, Proust and almost every other major writer of the last great age. A translator, by contrast, works strictly for the present day. Relying on commissions from publishers, he is compelled to suit his writing to a contemporary reader's requirements. Translations, therefore, provide the best possible indication of the character of the literary public in any epoch.

In the last dozen years, though certainly not fruitful in the field of original writing, have produced a large output of well-written and successful translations, many of them of books that have often been translated before. The Penguin series, with almost a hundred titles, includes some of the most interesting. But there is much more to account for than the success of a single series. Since the rise of a new public has arisen, eager to read the old books, but seemingly unwilling to buy the old translations. The nature of this new public and the character of the translations has still to be examined. The new public appears to be made up of people with strict standards of accuracy. All the translations they have approved put up before sound. All in fact have abandoned the form of their originals in order to render the content with all possible clarity. As the discipline of the sciences has, in the last fifty years, greatly influenced the teaching of the Arts subjects, one need not assume that the readers of these translations are necessarily scientists by training. One cannot even be sure that many of them may not

have studied literature or languages at school, if not at university. For the reading of foreign books in the original, except for examination purposes, has probably declined in the last fifty years. The proportion of the population capable of reading Homer in Greek was certainly greater in 1909 than today; and the number capable of enjoying a book of the *Aeneid* in Latin has certainly not increased since then. But the number with sufficient French, German, Spanish, Russian and Italian to travel easily abroad, to read a newspaper and to hold a reasonable conversation has grown very considerably. One might suppose that translations from the ancient languages would be in demand, but that those from modern languages could be dispensed with.

There are three reasons why this is not so. Firstly because popular taste favours more complex works than it did fifty years ago. The great *artificial* epics, for instance, have latterly found new translators; and among lyrical poets the present-day public is most curious about Marino, Góngora, the minor poets of the seventeenth century and those since Baudelaire. Prose writers employing wide vocabularies and difficult sentence-constructions—Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust and Thomas Mann—are preferred to the Victorians' favourites—*Télémaque*, *Paul et Virginie*, Mérimée, the early Hugo and the German Romantics. The 'Of course I read it in the original' school has certainly not increased with the growth of modern language teaching. Not only is the form of that teaching much less literary than fifty years ago, but the demand on the reader's knowledge is now much higher.

For, secondly, the contemporary reader is very conscious of what he is missing if his knowledge of a foreign language is inadequate. Thirty years of *practical criticism*, beginning with the work of I. A. Richards, have effectually discouraged careless reading. Not only is Rilke far harder to understand than Goethe, and Montale than Leopardi, but a young person, in this age of scientific training, is far more reluctant than was his father to 'have a go'. Intuitive understanding, which frequently compensates for paucity of vocabulary, is rated low in a world where accuracy often masquerades as mastery. There are few now who embark on a new

language by buying a dictionary and the Oxford Book of its verse.

A third factor, however, has had even more influence on the modern revival of the translator's craft: the growing laziness of the reader. The Victorian's demand was for a substitute, not for a simplification of the original work. He liked to be reminded that the book he was reading belonged to another age and country. The contemporary reader, on the other hand, wants something more like a crib. He wants to be put in the position of the book's original reader, who had before him a work in his own language and of his own time, of which he understood all the allusions and caught all the overtones, since they were the common possession of educated men in his day. He wishes to be able to read swiftly, since many other amusements make claims on his leisure. He will not, therefore, accept those footnotes with which the Victorian translator frequently helped himself out. Everything must be explained by the text itself. Plainness and accuracy are therefore his chief demands. It is not 'a tale that holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner' that he requires, but one that can be read against a background of traffic, conversation and wireless.

In return for this simplification the post-war generation seems content to give up reading even easy works in foreign languages. Such books as *Candide* and *Manon Lescaut*, which did not sell freely in English before the war, being within the powers of anyone with 'Ordinary Level' French, have gone through several printings in recent translations. But there is at the same time a growing insularity of taste in this country. Most popular successes among novels have in the last years been in the English picaresque style, and the best of contemporary poetry has a distinctly provincial tang. One of the younger poets indeed has plainly stated that he does not read works in foreign languages. Owing to the high cost of French publications, moreover, very few bookshops carry sufficient stocks to tempt the new public.

It is not the original works of the post-war years in any language that have made the strongest impression in this country; it is the new translations, the first of which, E. V. Rieu's *Odyssey*, set a

standard on its first appearance in 1946, which has been followed, more or less faithfully, by many other translators. Like every other theory of translation, Rieu's advocacy of plain prose for most purposes is deceptive. Seurat's theory of *pointillisme* promised to make every man a painter; all he had to learn was how to put the spots correctly on the canvas. In fact hardly anyone after Seurat himself could do so. By analogy, a comparison between translations of four *artificial* epics, the *Argonautica*, the *Aeneid*, the *Pharsalia* and the *Lusiads*, all seemingly undertaken in the same convention, reveals great differences of quality and approach. Each is sufficiently clear and literal for its public, but the spots are laid on in very different ways.

In Rieu's own *Argonautica* Jason's slaughter of the giants who spring up from the serpent's teeth he has sown obviously demands a passage of fine writing; the moment is one of the most dramatic in the poem, and the translation rises to it:

By now the earthborn men were shooting up like corn in all parts of the field. The deadly War-god's sacred plot bristled with stout shields, double-pointed spears, and glittering helmets. The splendour of it flashed through the air above and struck Olympus. Indeed this army springing from the earth shone out like the full congregation of the stars piercing the darkness of a murky night, when snow lies deep and the winds have chased the wintry clouds away. But Jason did not forget the counsel he had had from Medea of the many wiles. He picked up from the field a huge round boulder, a formidable quoit that Ares might have thrown, but four strong men together could not have budged it from its place. Rushing forward with this in his hands he hurled it far away among the earthborn men, then crouched behind his shield, unseen and full of confidence. (III, 1356 *et seq.*)

Here the version of A. S. Way of 1901, written in the Victorian manner in rhymed couplets which endeavour to imitate the measure of the original, catastrophically fails:

Now by this was the harvest of earthborn men over all that field  
Upspringing: and all round bristled with thronging shield on shield  
And with battle-spears two-pointed, and morions glorious-gleaming  
The garth of the death-dealing War-god. . .

Attempting the poetic, Way falls into the clichés of the mock-antique. Rieu departs hardly at all from the Greek. In many cases, indeed, his words are the same as R. C. Seaton's in his somewhat ungraceful Loeb version. But his rhythms are entirely different. Like those of the born story-teller, they are rich in variety. Long sentences alternate with short. Sheer colloquialisms like *budge*—Seaton has *raised it . . . even a little*—and *huge round boulder*—both Seaton and Way agree here—or the almost modish *formidable*—Way and Seaton have *terrible*—alternate with near-archaisms, like *stout shields*, *the full congregation of the stars*—Way and Seaton have *all the hosts*—and *Medea of the many wiles*. Rieu's method is the opposite of T. S. Eliot's in his later plays. He passed off on his reader as very plain prose what is in fact a very subtle poetry. Eliot, on the other hand, prints in verse form what proves on the slightest examination to be unmistakable prose.

W. F. Jackson Knight's *Aeneid* is close to Rieu's *Argonautica* in principle, though his rhythms are, on the whole, more uniform. His account of Aeneas' drugging of Cerberus in the sixth book is good plain prose, and little more:

Through that part of the kingdom gigantic Cerberus sends echoing howls from his three throats. The monster lay in his cavern ahead of them. But the Priestess, seeing that the snakes of his mane were beginning to bristle, threw before him a morsel which she had charged with drowsiness from honey and drugged corn. Opening wide his three throats, the dog being mad with hunger, seized the offered food; and relaxing his giant back he sprawled all his length across the floor of the cave. Now that the guardian was unconscious, Aeneas dashed to reach the cave-entrance and swiftly escaped clear of the bank and the waves which allowed no return. (VI, 417 *et seq.*)

Jackson Knight's version is, in fact, like Dryden's, an expansion. His last sentence of twenty-seven words represents no more than sixteen of Virgil's. The last line of the original, for example:

evaditque celer ripam inremeabilis undae

is translated, and at the same time explained. Jackson Knight incorporates in his text all those notes on double-meanings that a Victorian translator would have put into footnotes. Robert Graves,

in his *Pharsalia*, not only does the same, but when discussing his version of the poem's opening lines claims that, for clarity's sake, he must. His language is more uniform than Rieu's, and less meticulous than Jackson Knight's. In describing the arch-witch Erichto, for instance, he deliberately dulls Lucan's more lurid splendours:

Witches have introduced the art of dragging the stars from the sky; and know how to turn the Moon dim and muddy-coloured, as though she were being eclipsed by the Earth's shadow—after which they pull her close to them and torture her until she secretes poisonous foam on the plants growing underneath. . . . She never appeared abroad in daylight and quitted the tombs only on wet or cloudy nights, when she went to catch and bottle whatever lightning happened to fall. (VI, 499 *et seq.*, and 518 *et seq.*)

Even if Graves had not flaunted the fact in his introduction, one could not help suspecting that he was somewhat bored by his author. In using such words as *secretes* and *bottles*, which are quite unjustified by the Latin, he is undoubtedly poking fun at Lucan. The honest Loeb translation of J. D. Duff renders the last sentence: 'She issues forth from rifled tombs and tries to catch the nocturnal lightnings'; which at least gives Lucan's meaning, though it of course misses his plangent pattern of repeated *t*'s and *u*'s in the last line and a half:

tunc Thessala nudis  
Egreditur bustis nocturnaque fulmina captat.

Lucan's rhetoric, his love of horrors, and his tricks of hyperbole and paradox engaged the attentions of one first-class Renaissance translator, Christopher Marlowe, who however did not get farther than the first book. But Lucan has far closer affinities with the seventeenth century; and the Spanish adaptation—it is not a translation—by Juan de Jáuregui—is, by any standards, a fine poem in the *culto* manner. Jáuregui, a gongoristic opponent of Góngora, shared Lucan's interest in horror, witchcraft and scenes of battle, as can be seen from his original poems; the descent into hell of his *Orfeo* looks back to Lucan and forward to the Romantics. He had, moreover, a mastery of the rhymed octet as effortless as his Latin master's of the hexameter. Both temperamentally, and by his epoch,

he was far more capable of doing the *Pharsalia* justice than Robert Graves. A master of ironic understatement in a tight-lipped time, though no less a poet than his Spanish predecessor, is clearly not the man to undertake it. For to reduce Lucan to his prose meanings is to turn him into a second-rate chronicler with a weakness for melodramatic digressions; and to make him a whipping-boy, as Graves does in his introduction, for those poets 'whom loss of faith in their own national institutions, ethics, religion, and even in themselves, sends marching and counter-marching through the Waste Land' is to judge the poet of one age by the standards of another.

Even in the most unsympathetic age, a poet may find an adequate translator, who is, like the American scholar Leonard Bacon, capable of producing a version independent of contemporary fashion. Bacon's *Lusiads* convey more of Camões' quality in orthodox poetic form than Professor Atkinson's scholarly and workaday Penguin prose. For just as Lucan is actually embellishing rather than chronicling history, so Camões is celebrating rather than narrating the voyages of Da Gama. Though a less mannered poet than Lucan, Camões stands at the beginning of that poetic age that was to culminate in Góngora. The germs of *culto* rhetoric were already present in his epic, as they were in the high-sounding *state-poems* of his Spanish contemporary Herrera. Indeed the episode of the 'new Argonauts' landing on the island prepared by Venus for their delectation, in Camões' ninth canto, already looks forward to the island theme of the *Soledades*. In Atkinson's version it is uneven in its language:

Ennobling the heights with their leafy crowns were poplars, the tree sacred to Hercules. Apollo's sacred laurels, the myrtles of Venus, and Cybele's pines, that told of her faithless lover. The tapering cypress pointed the way to the heavenly Paradise. . . The stalwart Portuguese, eager to be touching land once more, were now hastening up the beach, not a man of them remaining behind. One attraction was the pleasures of the chase: little did they think that among those enchanting hills there was hunting to be had without snare or net, as gentle, tame and accommodating as Venus had there disposed for them. (IX. 57 and 66)

This earthly paradise in which the nymphs are to be caught *without snare or net* is rendered ridiculous by the flat *little did they think*. A full poetic version would probably write *they dreamt not*, which is in fact truer to the Portuguese:

Não cuidam, que sem laço, ou redes, caia  
 Caça naquelles montes deleitosos  
 Tão suave, domestica, e benina  
 Qual ferida la tinha já Erycina.

Again, *accommodating* for *benina* suggests not a nymph but a pick-up. Atkinson in fact falls into that same snare into which Graves deliberately jumps. Though without Graves' impatience with his model, Atkinson in his attempts to modernise, indulges in the same criticism by parody which made Graves choose such words as *secretes* and *bottles*. Moreover, Atkinson also fails to bring over the pre-Miltonic *bead-roll* of the classical past contained in Camões' catalogue of trees; and he reduces the sailors' innocent Golden Age chase among the enchanted hills to a prosaic and urban scamper.

The fault lies in the method. Rieu's apparently straightforward narrative in *Odyssey* and his *Argonautica* disguises, as has been said, an essentially poetic approach to his material. It does not provide a model for the rendering into prose of other poems, often much more mannered, by scholarly translators with a more complicated and critical attitude to their authors. Both Graves and Atkinson have proved themselves splendid translators of prose. But Rieu, by at once inviting and defying imitation, has by now conclusively proved that his Seurat method is not universally applicable.

The plain prose version being generally inadequate, and the new reader stubbornly reluctant to attempt the works that interest him in their original language, two possible compromises exist, which will, I believe, be increasingly followed by translators in the next decades. The first is the face-to-face or *pony* solution, whereby the reader with inadequate language is enabled to give himself a lift by glancing at a plain prose rendering on the opposite page, or at the foot of his text. Here Jackson Knight's expanded, well-written

and unpretentious crib of the *Aeneid* provides the best model. Kinder than Loeb to the unskilled reader, he guides him through the difficult places with a sure tread, and suggests to him by the careful choice of his equivalents the different value of words to Virgil and his time. Unlike Graves, he does not look forward, and does not underrate his author. Though this method demands more of the reader than that of plain presentation in prose, leading him at a second or third reading, to follow the left-hand page without undue reference to the right, it immediately brings him into direct contact with his original, and may perhaps with time make him more willing to read a foreign language *even without complete comprehension*; which is I believe, in the case of poetry, a far more real experience than reading even the best translations.

The second alternative is provided by the poetic recasting of an older poem in the convention and the measures of our own time. If the plain prose method is rejected, this is the only way in which poems in little-known languages can be rendered. In its extreme form, as in Pound's 'Homage to Sextus Propertius', we are given not Propertius but the spectacle of Pound reading and commenting on Propertius. Robert Lowell is more honest in describing his poem 'The Ghost' as *after* the Latin poet. Day Lewis's *Aeneid*, however, though as uneven in its choice of language as Graves' *Pharsalia*, gives the reader a living poem in the language of his own day, such half-hidden echoes of the old alliterative verse as it contains serving unobtrusively to give it a slight patina of age. Day Lewis's Styx suggests a recognisable landscape and his 'god-fearing' Aeneas, though Dido anachronistically takes him 'a tour of her city', succeeds in being a figure not entirely of plaster if not entirely of flesh either. Nor is Day Lewis's *bristling* dog a mere taxidermist's freak:

Huge Cerberus, monstrosly couched in a cave confronting them,  
Made the whole region echo with his three throated barking.  
The Sibyl, seeing the snakes bristling upon his neck now,  
Threw him for bait a cake of honey and wheat infused with sedative drugs.

What may prevent a reader from accepting Day Lewis's shortened version of the *Aeneid* for the original are his almost inevitable preconceptions as to the grand and solemn nature of a classical poem. Arthur Waley's versions of Chinese poems meet with no such difficulties. Though his language, on analysis, proves to be the post-Hopkins idiom of the 'twenties, and a certain tight-lipped irony in his approach shows Waley to be the contemporary of Robert Graves, the reader does not doubt that he is meeting the eighth-century poet Li-po, in Waley's version of his address to a nobleman who has lost his wealth and position:

When Chuang Chou dreamed he was a butterfly  
The butterfly became Chuang Chou.  
If single creatures can thus suffer change,  
Surely the whole world must be in flux?  
What wonder then if the ocean of P'êng-lai  
Should dwindle into a clear, shallow stream  
Or the man who plants melons at the Green Gate  
Should once have been the Marquis of Tung Ling?  
If wealth and honour indeed be flighty as this  
By our toiling and moiling what is it that we seek?

A poem from another age and continent is thus added to the English language. The process of accretion is slow. Each foreign poet demands a fellow-poet temperamentally sympathetic to him, and a fashion that to some extent coincides with the fashion of his day. Pope can imitate Horace, but not Propertius; a twentieth-century poet can attempt Baudelaire but not Hugo. If the reader's refusal to read foreign languages continues, more small-scale recastings of this sort will no doubt be attempted. For the present, our hope must be that a new generation, introduced early to the face-to-face method and less discouraged by a scientific attitude to literature, will be bold enough to read straight ahead, letting sound carry them over the places where they are uncertain of the sense.

# *The Spectator*

ROY FULLER

Great suns, the street lamps in the pinhead rain;  
Surfaces gradually begin to shine;  
Brunettes are silvered; taxis pass in line  
On tires that beat through moisture like a pain.  
Doubtless upon such evenings some at least  
Of those events that shaped his soul occurred:  
Against the streaming glass a whispered word  
Whitened and faded, and the shapeless beast  
Drank from the dripping gutters through the night.  
But all the child expressed and feared is long  
Forgotten: only what went wholly wrong  
Survives as this spectator of the flight  
Of lovers through the square of weeping busts  
To happiness, and of the lighted towers  
Where mad designs are woven by the powers;  
Of normal weather, ordinary lusts.

# Anthologies

JOHN PRESS

NEW SIGNATURES. Edited by Michael Roberts. *Hogarth Press* (1932).

THE FABER BOOK OF MODERN VERSE. Edited by Michael Roberts. *Faber* (1936).

THE OXFORD BOOK OF MODERN VERSE. Edited by W. B. Yeats. *O.U.P.* (1936).

THE MODERN POET. Edited by Gwendolen Murphy. *Sidgwick & Jackson* (1938).

POETRY OF THE PRESENT. Edited by Geoffrey Grigson. *Phoenix House* (1949).

CONTEMPORARY VERSE. Edited by Kenneth Allott. *Penguin Books* (1950).

THE CHATTO BOOK OF MODERN VERSE. Edited by C. Day Lewis & John Lehmann. *Chatto & Windus* (1956).

POETRY NOW. Edited by G. S. Fraser. *Faber* (1956).

NEW LINES. Edited by Robert Conquest. *Macmillan* (1956).

MODERN VERSE IN ENGLISH. Edited by David Cecil & Allen Tate. *Eyre & Spottiswoode* (1958).

TWO savage essays written in 1927 by Robert Graves in collaboration with Laura Riding put forcibly and wittily the case against anthologies.<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite this commination, anthologies of modern verse continue to be popular and even to serve some useful purposes. A well-chosen anthology may give pleasure to a number of people who would otherwise never read any poetry; it may guide the young and the inexperienced, leading them to explore the works of individual poets for themselves; it will sift the mass of new poems published year by year and draw public attention to the few poets worth reading; it may, by making clear

<sup>1</sup> 'True Anthologies and Popular Anthologies' and 'The Perfect Modern Lyric'. Reprinted in *The Common Asphodel* (1949), pp. 169-95.

the direction in which the stream of poetry is flowing, be a valuable history of public taste and a force which moulds such taste.

*New Signatures*, which is in some ways a trial run for the *Faber Book* of 1936, contains the work of nine poets, including poems by three-quarters of that mythical beast MacSpaunday—there is nothing here by Louis MacNeice. The preface by Michael Roberts offers one or two judgements on which time has conferred a certain pathos and irony: William Empson's poems have scarcely removed 'the difficulties which have stood between the poet and the writing of popular poetry', nor has English poetry 'again become a popular, elegant and contemporary art'. Moreover, of the nine poets represented here, Julian Bell (who was killed in Spain), John Lehmann, William Plomer and A. S. J. Tessimond were all to be dropped by Roberts four years later. Had the members of his team anything in common except their youth and the fact that he liked their verse? Was there indeed a poetic renaissance about 1930, and was Roberts led astray by his assumption that a poet must be 'abreast of his own times'?

For an answer to these questions we must turn to the *Faber Book*. Its merits are great: here, for the first time, is an attempt to survey the course of English and American poetry of the preceding twenty-five years; the choice of poems shows that Roberts had the rarest of all gifts in an anthologist, the ability to tell a good poem from a bad; the introduction that he was a man of a powerful and original intelligence. It is not surprising that this selection moulded the taste of a generation, and it remains the best anthology of modern verse yet published, a lasting monument to its editor.

To say this is not to maintain that its influence on English poetry and criticism was wholly beneficial. Roberts was fond of the words *significant* and *significance* which (together with the word *creative*) were later to be parroted by lesser men who used them as vaguely laudatory descriptions. Even as employed by Roberts these terms beg a good many questions. We read in the Introduction that the anthology 'represents the most significant

poetry of this age', although it 'is not intended to be a comprehensive anthology of the best poems of our age' (p. 1). The implied distinction between best and most significant, even if we were told of what the significant poetry was significant, is unsatisfactory. For if a significant poem is not necessarily a good poem why should we be asked to admire it, unless the anthologist is exhibiting it to us much as a surgeon demonstrates to medical students an interesting specimen of a morbid growth? This distinction also encourages the converse belief that poets who write good verse which is not significant are merely competent versifiers, on a rather lower plane than the creative artists who have been dubbed significant and admitted through the sacred portals.

Roberts tells us that Sorley, de la Mare, Blunden, Muir, Plomer and Campbell are omitted because they have not felt 'compelled to make any notable development of poetic technique'. Hardy, one presumes, was omitted for the same reason, though Hopkins is well represented. It seems then that significant poets are those who develop poetic technique, and who do so in a particular way, in much the same spirit as other members of the community 'use their mathematical notation to modify and organise our scientific knowledge' (p. 32). Thus significant poetry is likely to become as specialised and as intricate as higher mathematics. Modern poets, we are informed (p. 30), dislike the tendency to over-emphasise regular metrical patterns, which:

seems to them not to increase the significance of the poetry, but to diminish it by asserting an arbitrary music at the expense of meaning, and to read their poems as songs, and necessarily bad songs, is to misread them completely.

We learn furthermore (p. 32) that 'today the auditory rhetoric of a poem is dictated, not by its own rules, but by the central impulse of the poem'. This assumption, whether spoken or unspoken, has gradually hardened into a fundamental tenet of orthodox modern poetic theory, so that the undergraduate editor of *Delta*, Christopher Levenson, can announce as a matter of course that:

to impose arbitrary and external rules rather than to allow the artist's experience to mould its organic form, is merely perverse.<sup>1</sup>

Donald Davie's reply is a direct challenge to this dogma which had been given so powerful an impetus by Michael Roberts twenty years before:

The metrical and other habits of English verse seem to me to be in no sense 'arbitrary', but rather to be rooted in the nature of English as a spoken and written language; I see no other explanation of the fact that the rules which, say, Mr. Amis and Mr. Graves observe are the rules which have governed ninety per cent of English poetry for more than 500 years. I think it is of the nature of a rule to be 'external'. And as for that old crotchet of 'organic form', I must admit that I find it only a form of words . . .<sup>2</sup>

The *Faber Book* was immensely influential because Roberts had delineated what seemed to be a coherent pattern in the poetry of a quarter of a century, had found in it certain specifically modern elements and had even managed to convince his readers that, in some remarkable fashion, the poets canonised in his anthology represented not merely *a* modern tradition but *the* modern tradition. Today it seems to us that no such unified tradition can be discerned and that Roberts's feat in isolating and tracing a line of modern poetry was a *tour de force*, an incomparable piece of legerdemain. But his anthology remains both a valuable historical document and a permanent record of one man's beautifully controlled sensibility and intelligence.

In November 1936, eight months after the *Faber Book*, appeared the *Oxford Book*, edited by W. B. Yeats, a fascinating collection, and all the more so because of the erratic principles, or lack of them, on which it was compiled. All his life Yeats had moved in an atmosphere of quarrelsome turbulence, which he did not forsake even in his editorial capacity. When Robert Graves and Laura Riding suggested the inclusion of James Reeves, Yeats replied:

Too reasonable, too truthful. We poets should be good liars, remembering always that the Muses are women and prefer the embrace of gay, warty lads.

<sup>1</sup> *Delta*, Number 8 (Spring 1956), p.8.

<sup>2</sup> *Delta*, Number 9 (Summer 1956), p. 27.

So Graves and Laura Riding refused to contribute themselves.<sup>1</sup> Yeats has been generally censured (and rightly so) for his refusal to include the work of Owen and of Rosenberg. He explains that he has omitted them because 'passive suffering is not a theme for poetry'; in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley he writes with even more vehemence and less judgement:

When I excluded Wilfred Owen, whom I consider unworthy of the poets' corner of a country newspaper, I did not know that I was excluding a revered sandwich-board man of the revolution, and that somebody has put his worst and most famous poem in a glass-case in the British Museum—however, if I had known it, I would have excluded him just the same. He is all blood, dirt and sucked sugar-stick.<sup>2</sup>

It is easy to find fault with Yeats's omissions and inclusions, but only a critic obsessed with the importance of nice discrimination and with the wickedness of admiring anything which has not been certified by the most mature judges would wish that the *Oxford Book* had been compiled by anyone else. For even if Yeats was always wrong (I think that he was right about Dorothy Wellesley and may have been right about W. J. Turner), who would not want to know what the greatest poet of his time thought about his lesser contemporaries? And some of his casual remarks throw more light on the poets concerned than pages of more systematic criticism, as when he says of Bridges, 'Every metaphor, every thought a commonplace, emptiness everywhere, the whole magnificent'; of *A Shropshire Lad*, 'a mile further and all had been marsh'; of Pound, that one feels 'he has not got all the wine into the bowl, that he is a brilliant improvisator translating at sight from an unknown Greek masterpiece'. Yeats had been honoured as a poet for fifty years when he compiled this anthology: it is his last testament and tribute to the fellow-poets of his youth, to the most notable poets of the present century and to the youngest generation of poets for whom, in his late sixties, Yeats publicly declared his admiration.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Graves, *The Crowning Privilege* (1955), p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (1954), p. 874.

Of the contemporary-verse anthologies designed for the classroom, *The Modern Poet* is probably the most satisfactory. The choice of poems is sound, the introduction is sensible and the notes, without being fussy, provide some useful information. Some of the poets represented in the anthology themselves explain certain difficulties in particular poems or offer a brief summary of what they are trying to achieve in the practice of their art. Edwin Muir's account of how he composed 'The Riders' affords a revealing insight into the genesis and the gradual development of a poem from an image whose full purport may not at once be apparent even to the poet. Laura Riding's attempt to define the nature and the purpose of poetic creation is another valuable contribution to an understanding of how a poem comes to be written. Like Muir's note on 'The Riders', this statement has not, so far as I know, been reprinted elsewhere.

The liveliest 'little magazine' of the 'thirties devoted to poetry was *New Verse*, edited by Geoffrey Grigson. In 1949 he brought out *Poetry of the Present*, in which he aimed at including 'the good poets of what appear to be the last three poetic generations, the last three instalments of modernity—since Eliot. No poet herein was born earlier than 1904.' Unlike Michael Roberts, Grigson does not try to trace a peculiarly modern tradition in poetry or even to make his collection representative, arguing that 'if the poems are good . . . the representation follows without being forced'. His introduction, like all his critical writing, is sharp, even spiky, reiterating the decisive, vigorous judgements which he has been passing on contemporary verse for twenty-five years or more. He maintains (correctly, I believe) that Auden's brilliance and power have not diminished with the years; that he and MacNeice were the great talents of the 'thirties; that E. J. Scovell and Norman Cameron are still too little read. He gives us 170 poems by thirty-six poets, a sensible plan, which allows him to allot adequate space to the important writers and to represent the lesser names by a couple of poems apiece. How difficult it is for even the most acute of critics to prophesy the future of poetry is shown here by Grigson's guess that Bayliss, Kirkup and Stanford

were likely to usher in a poetic revolution with a leaning towards romanticism: but who could have foretold that Larkin, Wain and Amis were to give verse a new twist in the 'fifties?

Since 1950 several anthologies have attempted to survey the verse of the past half-century. The Penguin *Contemporary Verse*, with its succinct critical notes, is a brave shot at bringing modern poetry to a potentially huge audience, but it is impossible to cram 127 poems by sixty-one authors into under 230 pages (including notes and bibliographies) without squeezing out the individual flavour of the chosen poets. Even the *Chatto Book*, though it is twice the size of the Penguin anthology, does not wholly escape the perils which surround any attempt to include verse by nearly a hundred writers of the past forty years. Less rigorously selective than the *Faber Book*, less idiosyncratic than the *Oxford Book*, without notes or an introduction, concealing even the dates of its poets, it is probably the best general survey of major and minor verse 1915-1955.

More ambitious and less successful is *Modern Verse in English*, a selection from English and American poets of the present century, with Hopkins and Emily Dickinson thrown in for good measure. Allen Tate's introduction, like his selection, splendidly illuminates what he calls 'a certain high contemporary tradition' in American poetry. This tradition:

has resisted the strong political pressures which ask the poet to 'communicate' to passively conditioned persons what a servile society expects them to feel.

Unhappily, the English section of the book will satisfy nobody who admires Tate's standards of criticism and of choice. Lord David believes that Eliot did not inaugurate a poetic revolution, since minor poets still write about nature in the pastoral style; he thinks that Belloc, Chesterton and Brooke merit eighteen pages; and that Alice Meynell, Mary Coleridge and Fredegond Shove deserve space in an anthology where there is no room at all for Rosenberg, Cameron, Fuller and Norman Nicholson (to name only a few of the omissions). The anthology is, however, worth

having for the American section and, in fairness to Lord David, one must admit that the choice of the half-dozen best English poets of the century is adequate.

In *Poetry Now* G. S. Fraser treads delicately through the maze of poems by writers who have begun to make their reputations since 1939. A skilful guide, who does not try to emulate the passionate advocacy of Michael Roberts, he says in effect: here are seventy-odd poets, none of whom is represented by more than a couple of poems apiece; this is the kind of verse being written today; choose for yourself which you think the best, and remember that those who make the most noise in the literary periodicals are not necessarily the best poets.

Such an attitude is sensible and urbane, yet one wishes that there were an anthology which, like the *Faber Book* in its day, seriously attempted to make sense of developments in poetry over the past twenty-five years. In the *Manchester Guardian*, 18 November 1958, Philip Larkin maintains that 'deserted by the tide of taste, the modern movement awaits combing like some cryptic sea-wrack'.

Is this true? And if so, have the poets assembled by Robert Conquest in *New Lines* restored poetry to health, much as Malherbe in his day cleansed French poetry of its residual nuisances?

Larkin's verdict seems to me unacceptable, if only because, as I have already suggested, the existence of a single, unified modern movement is largely a myth. Even if Yeats, Pound and Eliot can be lumped together as a group of poets sustained by a common aesthetic ideal, it is impossible to fit Muir, Graves and Lawrence into any neat category. As for Auden and Dylan Thomas, they neither resemble each other, nor do they continue the line of poetry traced, in their different ways, by Yeats, Pound and Eliot. Larkin may mean that the impulse which began when these three poets fertilised English verse with the doctrines of Symbolism and of Imagism is now exhausted; that the reaction of Auden and of his contemporaries against this post-Symbolist tradition has guttered out; that the suggestive imagery and reverberating music

which, at his best, Dylan Thomas controlled so finely, gave rise in the 1940's to a school of greatly inferior writers whose verse was undisciplined and pretentious, their imagery a mere proliferation of nonsense, their music an incoherent ululation, a debased, emotional ranting.

I find it hard to agree even with this: the achievements of the elder poets are there for all to see, and if we have nothing to learn from them, so much the worse for us. Auden and MacNeice, to name only two poets now in their fifties, obstinately refuse to lie stranded on the shore; and it is a gross over-simplification to argue that from 1940 to 1955 all English poetry degenerated into a turgid neo-romanticism.

*New Lines*, like *New Signatures*, is designed to persuade us that nine poets have begun to solve problems which for years past have stultified the growth of poetry. As with the earlier anthology, the wisest course is to enjoy the best poems in it, to remember that good poets, as they develop, become harder and harder to classify, and to swallow with a pinch of salt everything that the editor of a manifesto has to say about the state of poetry before he and his rescue-squad came on the scene. Indeed we cannot repeat too often that even the best anthology is no more than an introduction to individual poets, and that the reading of many anthologies is a poor substitute for the study of a writer's collected poems.

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#### A REVIEW OF ENGLISH LITERATURE. Vol. I. No. 2

The second number will be published on the last Monday in April. Its theme will be the contemporary English novel, and the discussion will be opened by K. W. Gransden. There will be articles by Peter Green, Robert Liddell, Michael Millgate, Frank O'Connor and Ian Scott-Kilvert. The review article will be by Frank Kermode on Lawrence Durrell's *Clea*.

# Dryden Redivivus

F. T. PRINCE

‘**D**RYDEN is no discovery; there are few of his merits as a writer that have not been discovered and brought to light by one or another earlier critic.’ So wrote one of Dryden’s chief modern defenders, Mr. T. S. Eliot, more than twenty-five years ago;<sup>1</sup> and the mass of Dryden studies, together with Dryden’s fairly regular recurrence as a topic of criticism, might seem to confirm the assumption that there is little new to be known or thought of this poet. Yet modern readers have not been in a position to read much of the poetry with a proper provision of notes and comments; and it is quite possible that Professor Kinsley’s magnificent new edition<sup>2</sup> will bring about a fairly rapid evolution in their conception of Dryden’s greatness. ‘Absalom and Achitophel’ has for many years been the only major poem available in the kind of edition which most students need. The new Dryden offers an apparatus for all the verse; this should rehabilitate particularly ‘Religio Laici’ and ‘The Hind and the Panther’, the latter of which is not only more than usually difficult, but has been intelligible only if read in the edition of Scott and Saintsbury.

Professor Kinsley not only provides the reader with all he absolutely needs to know: he shows great restraint and judgement in not going beyond this. The text is not made a pretext, either for such political or theological self-expression as Victorian editors enjoyed, or for the indiscriminate heaping-up of documentation that can be found in some twentieth-century editions. Even the appearance of the poems on the page reveals their formal beauties

<sup>1</sup> *John Dryden. The Poet, the Dramatist, the Critic* (New York, 1932), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> *The Poems of John Dryden*, edited by James Kinsley (Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press, 1958). 4 Volumes. £10 10s. net.

more clearly than the closely printed double columns of some of the standard texts.

If, then, there are any discoveries to be made about Dryden's poetry, they will be greatly facilitated by this text. And in fact, it is to be hoped that people will re-consider their view of the poet, and ask themselves whether it is not still incomplete, in spite of what is generally regarded as a revival of Dryden's fame going back some forty years. For Dryden has certainly not made the same progress with modern readers as Pope, who has undergone a more effective re-appraisal in the same period. Some of the reasons for this difference are obvious: Pope's poetry is more personal, it is more compact, disciplined and finished, than most of Dryden's. On the whole its perusal bears out the poet's claim to have written as an exceptionally civilised, exceptionally gifted, and always intensely 'engaged' individual. The fineness is sustained, and not too long sustained to lose its effect. (The fact that Pope would never have written as he did, if Dryden had not achieved that kind of poetry, is naturally overlooked, and cannot in any case contribute to our direct enjoyment of the earlier poet.) And if, even in his best individual pieces, Dryden is more diffuse and sometimes more shoddy than Pope ever is, this diffuseness is repeated on a larger scale in his writings taken as a whole. Greater bulk than significance is what we first see, and our impression is confirmed by the vast and bewildering variety of his total labours—dramas, prose and translations, as well as original verse in many kinds.

All this makes it easier to accept Dryden as a man of letters than to undertake the task (which must always be difficult) of deciding exactly what we think of him as a poet. It is one of the weaknesses of Mr. Eliot's advocacy that he has always emphasised Dryden's total achievement, and its historical importance, rather than the potency of his best poetry. The other main weakness of modern Drydenians—even in one so sympathetic to seventeenth-century preoccupations as Mr. Eliot—is a refusal to put forward any claim for the seriousness of Dryden's thought.

Mr. Eliot's New York lectures on Dryden were three, on the Poet, the Dramatist, and the Critic; his earlier *Homage to John*

*Dryden* was hardly less comprehensive. Yet surely the first thing for the literary critic to face is that Dryden's plays were forced labour, uncongenial hackwork, however much historical importance they may have, and whatever they contributed to his own technical progress. There is no verse in the heroic plays which is not far surpassed by Dryden elsewhere. *All for Love*, which in style is an admirable adaptation of Shakespeare, is in content a crude debasement of both Shakespeare and Racine. The understandable enthusiasm for drama which inspires many critics and readers today has failed to revitalise Dryden's plays, which are beyond help; but it has succeeded in blurring the question of what we are to read, where we are to look for evidence of Dryden's stature. Mr. Eliot has never attempted to winnow the grain from the chaff, because Mr. Eliot is chiefly fired by the idea of Dryden as the complete man of letters, the gifted poet in touch with the London of his day, interested to the right degree in criticism and drama, politics and religion, and always experimenting to improve the English language. Dryden appeals to Mr. Eliot far more as a seventeenth-century version of himself than as the creator of a well-defined body of satisfying poetry.

One of Mr. Eliot's motives for celebrating Dryden is thus that he provides a perfect illustration of what the English social and literary tradition could do for a poet of genius. Yet one does not have the impression that this critic has lingered in delight over many individual passages or poems; Mr. Eliot is inclined to lapse into a general view of Dryden's greatness, to lean rather heavily on Dr. Johnson, and to let the life go out of his own perceptions. But no amount of stress on a writer's historical importance can replace a close and continuous response to his poetry.

If Mr. Eliot is hampered, not only by being too grandly judicial, but by a curious lack of interest in the substance of Dryden's thought, most others have been overcome by the sheer mass of verse to be appreciated, and have been led to a superficial view of some of it. The twentieth-century critic who, together with Mr. Eliot, has done most for Dryden is Mr. Mark van Doren, whose study of *The Poetry of John Dryden* remains the most

detailed and comprehensive book of its kind.<sup>1</sup> That this assessment was of great value when it first appeared is obvious; that it continues to be of practical use many readers will testify; and that the critical values it applies are still active is proved by Bonamy Dobrée's recent study, which efficiently represents both Eliot and van Doren in brief.<sup>2</sup>

The procedure consists in first restoring Dryden to greatness as a man of letters, dramatist and journalist in verse; that is easy enough. But the want of some crowning *ethos* is felt; and this was sought between the wars, and is still sought today, in representing him as fundamentally a Restoration libertine and wit. These critics seem at times to be engaged in bringing about a revolution which would mean that Rochester, for example, would emerge as a poet as great as Marlowe or Baudelaire or Lucretius. At other times their comments suggest that they suffer from a sheer lack of perception and concern for truth. This remark by Mr. van Doren on Dryden's 'character', so much reproved by nineteenth-century scholars, may serve to show these limitations: 'The better view seems latterly to be that there is little reason to be sorrowful over the behaviour of a canny man of letters who never at any time pretended to be equipped with principles worth dying or becoming a pauper for.'<sup>3</sup>

Both his poetic genius and his intellectual power set Dryden apart from the Ethereges, Sedleys, Rochesters and the other 'men of great employment, that [were] every moment rattling from the Eating-Houses to the Play-Houses, from the Play-Houses to the Mulberry-Garden, that [lived] in a perpetual hurry, and [had] little leasure for . . . idle entertainment'.<sup>4</sup> These contemporaries of Dryden, his friends and acquaintances, and sometimes his enemies, saw a strange contradiction between the sophistication of his verse

<sup>1</sup> First published in 1920; reprinted as *John Dryden: A Study of His Poetry* (New York), 1946.

<sup>2</sup> *John Dryden* (published in the British Council series, *Writers and Their Work*, 1956).

<sup>3</sup> *John Dryden*, p. 255.

<sup>4</sup> Etherege, *She Wou'd if She Cou'd*, Act II, scene i.

and his lack of readiness or grace in conversation. They would not have agreed with Mr. C. S. Lewis that 'the man is irremediably ignorant of that world he chooses so often to write about',<sup>1</sup> for to them his poetry expressed the perfection of worldliness—it surpassed them in the qualities they aimed at. But they found Dryden socially unimpressive, and would readily have admitted that he was, if not something more, something other, than a man of the world. From the worldly point of view his career was at times brilliant, but erratic, precarious, and finally disastrous; and this was not because, as Mr. Lewis would have it, he was 'rather a boor, a gross, vulgar, provincial, misunderstanding mind',<sup>2</sup> but because he was a living intellectual being, who must react and evolve. His intellectual vitality went together with a certain, perhaps awkward, simplicity and seriousness—a capacity for conviction and enthusiasm; and all this contributes to the greatness of his verse.

Mr. Lewis has a genius for polemical writing, and polemics can seldom be practised without some unfairness. What has drawn him to be so unfair to Dryden is perhaps partly the method he took over from Eliot, that of a comparison between Dryden and Shelley. These two writers have nothing in common but their having both written in English, and in verse; any comparison between them verges on the grotesque. Why should we not cultivate the form of the inept comparison, and have a series which includes, say, comparisons between Spenser and Thomas Hardy, Herrick and Gerard Manley Hopkins, Tennyson and Langland? The results might be interesting, even uproarious, but they would not amount to serious criticism. Yet even when Mr. Lewis leaves measuring Dryden against Shelley, he continues to be less than just. No doubt it is true that in Dryden there is none of the 'architectural sublime' Mr. Lewis finds in Milton and Dante (but how many great writers would stand up, in that respect, to those two names?). But it is not at all true that "The Hind and the Panther" does not exist, as *Phèdre* or *Persuasion* or *The Alchemist*

<sup>1</sup> *Rehabilitations* (1938), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

exist. It is not a poem: it is simply a name which we give for convenience to a number of pieces of good description, vigorous satire, and "popular" controversy, which have all been yoked together by external violence'.<sup>1</sup> It is quite unjust to describe the force which holds together the various elements in this poem as 'external violence'; it is in fact Dryden's intellectual mastery and fervour, heightened by his sense of liberation as a convert. And this is something which Mr. Lewis is very well equipped to perceive, if he wished to do so.

However, Mr. Lewis has at least acknowledged the peculiar relevance of 'The Hind and the Panther' to any attempt at estimating Dryden's greatness. The ineffectiveness of much modern criticism lies in its not having given this massive poem its proper place. Dryden can never be seen clearly without the evidence of this poem, and of 'Religio Laici', which is an ante-chamber leading to it. Without these two pieces his thought will seem incomplete, when it is in truth firmly based and built. Yet how often have we heard that there is any 'thought' at all in Dryden, and how much less that his thought is personally realised, coherent and intellectually respectable? Perhaps in England since 1700 a process which leads to the acceptance of orthodox Christianity is liable to be regarded less as 'thought' than as the abdication of thought: Dryden's final adherence to Roman Catholicism has not predisposed English critics to examine his mind closely. In view of all this it needs to be said emphatically that his Tory political philosophy—which has certainly not gone without recognition<sup>2</sup>—led him directly to the problems of authority in religion which he discussed in 'Religio Laici'; and that these led him with equal directness to the acceptance of Catholic principles expressed in 'The Hind and the Panther'. The book which should have done most for Dryden's reputation in this century is one which does not concern itself with Dryden's poetry as such. It is Louis Bredvold's *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden*,<sup>3</sup> a study

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> See Walter Raleigh's 'John Dryden and Political Satire', in *Some Authors* (1923).

<sup>3</sup> Ann Arbor, (1934).

altogether admirable in its wide scope and clear method. Bredvold showed conclusively that Dryden's conversion, first to Anglican, then to Roman, Christianity can only be understood in the context of seventeenth-century Catholic apologetics—at least of that branch of apologetics, not wholly approved by the Holy See, which was aimed at the Pyrrhonism of Montaigne and the 'libertines'. Dryden's arguments fall into place as those of a sceptic making his way towards revealed religion. It may seem startling to compare Dryden's conversion to Pascal's; the difference in fineness between the two minds is obvious. Yet Dryden's journey from Deism to Catholic Christianity followed the same lines, and is quite as closely related to the thought of the century. Pascal's 'wager' is paralleled in Dryden's lines on faith and reason:

To take up half on trust, and half to try,  
Name it not faith, but bungling biggottry . . .  
Rest then, my soul, from endless anguish freed;  
Nor sciences thy guide, nor sense thy creed.  
Faith is the best ensurer of thy bliss;  
The Bank above must fail before the venture miss.

But perhaps it may be said, let Dryden's religious thought be as respectable, as perennial, as you like: it would still remain to be proved that it inspires him to his best poetry, or that the poems in which he expresses it should be taken as the test of his greatness. Here, of course, there is one practical solution; take 'Religio Laici' and 'The Hind and the Panther', and examine the range and quality of their style and language. I should be surprised if anyone who could appreciate Dryden's verse at all were not forced to recognise here the extraordinary mastery with which he has ranged from plain statement to exalted rhetoric, from shrewd satire to the glimmering, ambiguous fantastic beast-and-forest pictures of the later poem. For the latter quality, combined with a lurking devotional tenderness, one might point to the conclusion of the Second Part, beginning:

By this, the *Hind* had reach'd her lonely cell . . .

What a magnificent achievement the style of Dryden's mature works is—and how difficult to bring out its true nature for those who can only see it as tending to eighteenth-century artifice! It can only be fully appreciated as a personal version of the mixed style created by the Elizabethans, the mixture consisting, as in Spenser and Shakespeare, in the vocabulary, the tone, the interplay of rhetoric and simplicity.

Dryden's verse should pass the empirical test, if it is fairly applied to the two religious poems. And it is surely relevant that these are the works by which he might wish to be judged, and that modern critics have gone sadly wrong in not perceiving this, and the reasons for it.

Dryden wrote within the Christian humanist tradition which took shape in the sixteenth century and dominated poetry and drama (in Europe as a whole, if not in England) for the next two centuries. There was in theory and practice a hierarchy of artistic categories, in which sacred or 'divine' work took precedence over the 'profane' or merely secular. Few sixteenth-century Italian poets would write love-sonnets without correcting or complementing them by sonnets of devotion or penitence. In the conception of the Heroic Poem the scale of values comes out clearly: the only suitable subjects were those with a religious motive, or with a national motive presumed to be religious (for all European nations were Christian). It is easy to recognise these ideas when we consider *Paradise Lost*. It is more difficult to see that Dryden, turning to religious polemic in the 1680's, could also regard himself as attempting a higher reach than he had yet attained (the Preface to 'Religio Laici' reveals his consciousness of this). With his personal style, the flexible and mixed mock-heroic, heroic, and familiar style he had created in the satires, he now approaches the crowning 'heroic' matter—the question of truth in religion.

It is of course out of the question that modern criticism should accept the scale of literary values of the Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation. But it may be suggested that the dialectic underlying these formulas bears close interrogation, and might make an appeal to some new I. A. Richards engaged in devising

degrees of intensity in the literary experience. Is there in fact no hierarchy of value in 'subjects'? Is the 'subject-matter' as irrelevant to the achievement of a work of art as so much aesthetic theory since the nineteenth century has declared? Is there not much to be said for the principle that a religious or philosophical motive places the work at one stroke on a higher footing, gives it at least a higher ambition, than one merely documentary or entertaining? 'One does nothing in art or literature without general ideas,' said Henry James; and we do in practice range authors below or above one another according to their greater or less interest in abstractions. A theory of psychology, a view of society or history, a moral philosophy—these are what place George Eliot, or Conrad or James or Proust, above most of their contemporaries. It may seem enough to say that writers with such intellectual interests are in ambition, and therefore potentially, greater than others. It will indeed be enough if we are prepared to take this as a rule and accept its consequences. Applying it to the conditions of the seventeenth century we should then recognise that religious controversy and the choice of religion were in Dryden's time an over-riding intellectual interest. Dryden's religious poems would then take their place as necessarily the crown of his life's work (however we judged that work in the end); this was the greatest challenge that his genius could face, here an active mind would show itself prepared to go furthest and reveal the full stretch of its powers. It is a failure of perception to regard them as merely 'journalism in verse', of no more significance than *MacFlecknoe* or the Prologues and Epilogues.

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A REVIEW OF ENGLISH LITERATURE. Vol. I. No. 3

On page 70 there is a note about the contents of No. 2. No. 3 will be a general number with articles by Gustav Cross, Helen Darbishire, William Empson, E. M. W. Tillyard, Peter Ure and others.

## Notes on Contributors

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JAMES KINSLEY is Professor of English Language and Literature in the University of Wales (Swansea). He has edited the Oxford *Dryden*, Lindsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* and *Squyer Meldrum*, poems by Dunbar, and a history of Scottish poetry. He is preparing the Oxford editions of Burns and Dunbar.

EDMUND BLUNDEN, C.B.E., formerly Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, is Head of the Department of English in the University of Hong Kong. He has written several books of poetry and biographies, among them studies of Leigh Hunt, Hardy and Shelley. He has also edited numerous works including the poems of Clare, Owen and Ivor Gurney. His *Undertones of War* was published in a new edition in 1956.

GRAHAM HOUGH, who is a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, was formerly Professor of English Literature in the University of Malaya, and has taught in America at Johns Hopkins and Cornell. He is the author of *The Last Romantics* (1949), *The Romantic Poets* (1953), *The Dark Sun: a study of D. H. Lawrence* (1957), and some verse. His new book of critical essays, *Image and Experience*, is appearing in the spring.

C. S. LEWIS has been Professor of Mediaeval and Renaissance English at the University of Cambridge since 1954. He was previously Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford. He has published several novels and books for children, as well as writing *The Allegory of Love*, a Preface to *Paradise Lost* and the volume on *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* for the Oxford History of English Literature.

J. M. COHEN lives in London and is the author of a study of Browning, and of a survey of modern European poetry which will be published shortly. He is at present working on a translation of Bernal Diaz del Castillo's contemporary account of the Conquest of Mexico for the Penguin Classics, to which he has contributed *Don Quixote* and four other volumes. His version of Pascal's *Pensées* will appear this year.

ROY FULLER is a solicitor by profession and lives in London. His publications include *Poems* (1939), *Epitaphs and Occasions* (1949) and *Orchard* (1957). In prose, *Fantasy and Fugue* (1954) and *Image of a Society* (1956).

JOHN PRESS is the British Council Area Officer for Cambridge and East Anglia. He has published two critical works, *The Fire and the Fountain* and *The Chequer'd Shade*, and two books of poems, *Uncertainties* and *Guy Fawkes Night*.

F. T. PRINCE is Professor of English at the University of Southampton. He has published two volumes of poems, a study of *The Italian Element in Milton's Verse*, and an edition of *Samson Agonistes*. His edition of Shakespeare's *Poems* for the New Arden series is in the press.

# ***Forthcoming Literary Criticism***

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